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Women Framing Hair: Serial Strategies in Contemporary Art

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Part 1

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Abstract

This thesis explores the complex and enigmatic motif of hair in the work of five contemporary women artists, Chrystl Rijkeboer, Alice Maher, Annegret Soltau, Kathy Prendergast and Ellen Gallagher, from the late 1970s to the present.

The purpose of the research is to investigate why hair is such a productive and resonant site of meaning, how it is suggestive of and responds to serial strategies, and why it appears to be of particular significance to women who are artists. I explore the implications of hair as an embodied material, as well as its role as a haptic metaphor of the life cycle. I also discuss some of the divergent histories of hair as a rich marker of identity in cultural discourses of beauty, myth and femininity, and as a symbol of status and power. What might be seen as a darker, more liminal side of hair as a site of excess and body waste, and its ability to represent trauma and 'wounding', are also explored. As I argue, through its somatic connections hair can be positioned both of, and yet abjected from, the living body. Informed by a range of theoretical approaches, this research has drawn on Julia Kristeva's theorizations of the abject, Hélène Cixous's notion of *écriture féminine*, and a Deleuzian consideration of difference.

A major concern is the different artists' strategies and negotiations with notions of seriality, which enable rich and compelling possibilities for writing the female body in imaginative and fluid ways. This, together with gender issues, identity and the body – specifically the head – and memory as a marker of biography, are key themes throughout the thesis. In combination with its historiography, the medium of hair and its simulacra in art practice are seen to have the potential to challenge and subvert conceptions of feminine identity and some of the bastions of traditional painting and sculpture.

Contents

PART 1

Acknowledgements	5
List of Figures	6
Introduction	9
Why Hair?	16
Hair and Art Histories	18
Hair: Literature Review	28
Methodology and Approach	38
Overview of Thesis Chapters	40
 Chapter 1. Hairy Houses and Traumatic Echoes: Chrystl Rijkeboer's Serial Use of Hair	 46
Introduction	46
Hair and Historical Trauma	52
Hairy Houses and Familial Frames	63
Women's Practice and Feminist Concerns	69
Hair and Fairytales	74
Seriality, Cloning and Archiving Identity	78
Hair and Portraiture	82
Conclusion	90
 Chapter 2. Flow, Tangle and Coil: Alice Maher's Feminine Tresses	 92
Introduction	92
Hair and Seriality	96
Myth and Fairytales	109
The Girl-Child and Feminine Hair	118
Flows, Streams, and Becomings	124
Conclusion	129
 Chapter 3. Binding, Stitching, Trauma and the Haptic Thread: Annegret Soltau	 132
Introduction	132
German Context	136
A Haptic Thread	142
The Serial Line	149
Responses to Trauma: Hair, Webs and Thread	154
Identity and Erasure	164
Experiences of the Wounded Body	168
Conclusion	173

Chapter 4. Mapping Irish Identities and Domesticity: Hair in the Work of Kathy Prendergast and Dorothy Cross	176
Introduction	176
Irishness: Ideologies of Land and Woman	180
Hair and Women's Time	192
Diaspora and Domesticity	197
Mapping Hair: A Human Geography of Place, Time, and Self	203
Seriality and Equilibrium	209
Places and Spaces	213
Conclusion	217
Chapter 5. Revision, Transformation and Hair-Dos in the Work of Ellen Gallagher	220
Introduction	220
Histories of Black Hair	229
"It's all about repetition and revision": Processes, Tools, Materials	233
Gender, Blondenness, and The Middle Passage	246
The Languages of Hair	259
Irish Blackness	264
Conclusion	269
Conclusion	272
Serial Matter	274
Hair as Metaphor	276
The Prevalence of Hair in the Art Practices of Women	279
Appendix 1: Interview with Chrystl Rijkeboer	285
Appendix 2: Interview with Annegret Soltau	293
Bibliography	312
PART 11	
Appendix 3: Figures	

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List of Figures

- i Chiharu Shiota, *After The Dream* (2009)
- ii Millie Wilson, *Wig/Cunt* (1990)
- iii Valie Export, *Genitalpanik* (1969)
- iv Shigeko Kubota, *Vagina Painting* (1965)
- v Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll* (1975)

- 1.1 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Het Oordeel* (1998)
- 1.2 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *The Human System* (1997)
- 1.3 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Onschuld I* (1998)
- 1.4 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Onschuld II* (1998)
- 1.5 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Strijd* (1998)
- 1.6 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Lost Memories* (2000)
- 1.7 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Memories* (2000)
- 1.8 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Installatie Onschuld* (1998)
- 1.9 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Home Sweet Home* (2008)
- 1.10 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Sisters* (2007)
- 1.11 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Burka* (2006)
- 1.12 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *She Only Wanted a Boy* (2004)
- 1.13 Margi Geerlinks, *Untitled (Mother Knitting Child)* (1998)
- 1.14 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Forever Young* (2001)
- 1.15 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *R's Escape* (2008)
- 1.16 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Rapunzel* (2010)
- 1.17 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Safe House* (2010)
- 1.18 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *All in the Family* (2010)
- 1.19 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Kiss of the Wolf* (2010)
- 1.20 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Onschuld* (1998)
- 1.21 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Heaven or Hell, I, II and III* (2003)
- 1.22 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Baalbushka and Babooska* (2003)
- 1.23 Marc Quinn, *Self* (1991-)
- 1.24 Marc Quinn, *Sir John Edward Sulston* (2001)
- 1.25 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Family Portrait* (2005)
- 1.26 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *The Wedding* (2005)
- 1.27 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Avatar* (2006)
- 1.28 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Avatar* (2006)
- 1.29 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Perfect Strangers* (2004)
- 1.30 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Working Through the Wolf* (2011)
- 1.31 Chrystl Rijkeboer, *Beyond the Wolf* (2011)

- 2.1 Alice Maher, *Keep* (1992)
- 2.2 Alice Maher, *Folt* (1993)
- 2.3 Alice Maher, *Familiar I* (1994)
- 2.4 William Hincks, *Representing Spinning* (1791)
- 2.5 Alice Maher, *Swimmers* (1996)
- 2.6 Alice Maher, *Swimmers* (1994)
- 2.7 Alice Maher, *Les Filles d'Ouranos* (1996)
- 2.8 Alice Maher, *House of Thorns* (1995)
- 2.9 Alice Maher, *Andromeda* (2000)
- 2.10 Helen Chadwick, *Loop My Loop* (1991)
- 2.11 Alice Maher, *The Thicket* (1990)

- 2.12 Alice Maher, *Talking to My Hair* (1994)
- 2.13 Alice Maher, *Orsola* (2006)
- 2.14 Alice Maher, *Shard* (2001)
- 2.15 Alice Maher, *The Thicket* (2005)
- 2.16 Alice Maher, *Double Venus* (2005)

- 3.1 Annegret Soltau, *Generativ* (1994-2005)
- 3.2 Annegret Soltau, *Umschlossene* (1973)
- 3.3 Annegret Soltau, *Umschlossener Kopf* (1974)
- 3.4 Annegret Soltau, *Verletzung* (1974)
- 3.5 Annegret Soltau, *Selbst* (1975-6)
- 3.6 Annegret Soltau, *Selbst 10* (1975)
- 3.7 Annegret Soltau, *Demonstration* (19.1.1976)
- 3.8 Annegret Soltau, *Demonstration* (22.1.1976)
- 3.9 Annegret Soltau, *Aktion 'Ver-Bindungen'* (19.5.1976)
- 3.10 Faith Wilding, *Womb Room* (1972 and 1996)
- 3.11 Robert Rauschenberg, *Bed* (1955)
- 3.12 Annegret Soltau, *Prägedruck* (1971)
- 3.13 Annegret Soltau, *Überzeichnete Frau* (1972)
- 3.14 Annegret Soltau, *Meine Verlorenen Haare* (1977)
- 3.15 Annegret Soltau, *Eingesponnene Schaufensterpuppe* (1978)
- 3.16 Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece* (1964)
- 3.17 Piero Manzoni, *Linea* (1959)
- 3.18 Annegret Soltau, *Ich, Bedrückt* (1977-8)
- 3.19 Annegret Soltau, *Im Gleichgewicht* (1980-1)
- 3.20 Annegret Soltau, *Material-ZEICHNUNG Spinne* (1976-7)
- 3.21 Annegret Soltau, *Schwanger* (1977a)
- 3.22 Annegret Soltau, *Schwanger* (1977b)
- 3.23 Maina-Miriam Munsky, *Elektrode* (1973)
- 3.24 Annegret Soltau, *Mutter-Glück: Nach Chernobyl* (1990)
- 3.25 Annegret Soltau, *NY Faces-chirurgische Operationen X* (21.11.2001)
- 3.26 Annegret Soltau, *NY Faces-chirurgische Operationen XX* (8.2.2002)

- 4.1 Paul Henry, *The Potato Diggers* (1912)
- 4.2 Paul Henry, *The Watcher* (c.1914)
- 4.3 Kathy Prendergast, *Seabed* (1980)
- 4.4 Alexandre Cabanel, *The Birth of Venus* (1863)
- 4.5 Dorothy Cross, *Mantegna and Crucifix* (1996)
- 4.6 Kathy Prendergast, *The End and The Beginning I* (1997)
- 4.7 Dorothy Cross, *Virgin Shroud* (1993)
- 4.8 Kathy Prendergast, *The End and The Beginning II* (1997)
- 4.9 Kathy Prendergast, *Love Table* (1999)
- 4.10 Kathy Prendergast, *Love Object* (1999)
- 4.11 Alice Maher, *Ombre* (1997)
- 4.12 Kathy Prendergast, *City Drawings-London* (1992-2006)
- 4.13 Kathy Prendergast, *City Drawings-Brussels* (1992-2006)
- 4.14 Kathy Prendergast, *City Drawings-Yaounde* (1992-2006)
- 4.15 Kathy Prendergast, *City Drawings-Paris* (1992-2006)
- 4.16 Kathy Prendergast, *City Drawings-Lisbon* (1992-2006)
- 4.17 Kathy Prendergast, *City Drawings-Moscow* (1992-2006)
- 4.18 Kathy Prendergast, *City Drawings-Madrid* (1992-2006)

- 4.19 Kathy Prendergast, *City Drawings-Washington DC* (1992-2006)
- 4.20 Dorothy Cross, *Jellyfish Lake* (2002)
- 4.21 Dorothy Cross, *Jellyfish Lake* (2002)
- 4.22 Dorothy Cross, *Jellyfish Pillowcases* (2003)

- 5.1 Ellen Gallagher, *DeLuxe* (2004-5)
- 5.2 Ellen Gallagher, *eXelento* (2004)
- 5.3 Ellen Gallagher, *Preserve* (2001-2)
- 5.4 Ellen Gallagher, *Ice or Salt/Paris Doll (Preserve)* (2001-2)
- 5.5 Ellen Gallagher, *Yellow (Preserve)* (2001-2)
- 5.6 Ellen Gallagher, *Karate (Preserve)* (2001-2)
- 5.7 Ellen Gallagher, *Ice or Salt/Curl Cascade (Preserve)* (2001-2)
- 5.8 Ellen Gallagher, *Bird in Hand* (2006)
- 5.9 Ellen Gallagher, *Mr Terrific (DeLuxe)* (2004-5)
- 5.10 Ellen Gallagher, *Pomp-Bang* (2003)
- 5.11 Ellen Gallagher, *Detail, Pomp-Bang* (2003)
- 5.12 Ellen Gallagher, *Detail, Pomp-Bang* (2003)
- 5.13 Ellen Gallagher, *Detail, Pomp-Bang* (2003)
- 5.14 Ellen Gallagher, *Detail, Pomp-Bang* (2003)
- 5.15 Ellen Gallagher, *Detail, Pomp-Bang* (2003)
- 5.16 Ellen Gallagher, *Watery Ecstatic* (2007a)
- 5.17 Ellen Gallagher, *Detail, eXelento* (2004)
- 5.18 Ellen Gallagher, *Detail, eXelento* (2004)
- 5.19 Ellen Gallagher, *Detail, eXelento* (2004)
- 5.20 Ellen Gallagher, *Watery Ecstatic* (2001)
- 5.21 Ellen Gallagher, *Watery Ecstatic* (2007b)
- 5.22 Thomas Nast, *The Ignorant Vote: Honors are Easy* (1876)

Introduction

"The language of the self would be stripped of one of its richest resources without hair: and like language, or the faculty of laughter, or the use of tools, the dressing of hair in itself constitutes a mark of the human."¹

"Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement."²

Hair is relevant to every human being; we grow it, cut it, style it and depilate. Even as we manipulate and exert our preferences on it, hair maintains a complex and enigmatic function in our lives. Acting as a marker of identity, it has remained paramount throughout history in cultures across the world, and as Marina Warner says in *From The Beast To The Blonde* (1995), it is one of the 'richest resources' of the self. As a recurring theme in contemporary art practice it is a relatively under-researched yet compelling topic. This study examines what it is about hair that suggests itself as a productive site of meaning, and is particularly prevalent in the practices of artists who are women.

The artists chosen for this study are Annegret Soltau (1946-), Alice Maher (1956-), Kathy Prendergast (1958-), Chrystl Rijkeboer (1959-) and Ellen Gallagher (1965-). Their artistic careers began within a twenty-year period in the latter part of the twentieth century. Soltau lives and works in Germany, Maher and Prendergast are Irish, the former works in Ireland and the latter in England, Rijkeboer lives and works in The Netherlands, and Gallagher who is half Irish lives and works between New York and Rotterdam. I selected these artists for their work which reveals their diverse strategies with, and representations of, hair and the body. They also have a shared

¹ Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*, (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 371.

² Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans. by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, 1, 4, (Summer 1976), 875-93 (p. 875).

European cultural connection, and whilst the Irish connection to Maher, Prendergast and Gallagher signal some post-colonial issues, European concerns are not unproblematic either. Both Rijkeboer and Soltau explore the impact that events such as the Holocaust and Chernobyl can have on the embodied being through various themes, including trauma and wounding.

That these artists are women is of considerable significance to me as a woman writing, although I do not suggest that these artists can either be taken as paradigms of all women who make art, or that their work is only of significance to women, as I show later in this Introduction. I am concerned with exploring what happens when specific female artists locate their work in and through the body, and in this instance, by framing hair through serial strategies.³ I chose this combination of artists because their work has not been explored specifically in relation to either hair or the serial, and this research will attempt to find new meanings in the work of each of the artists. When the two engage, that is artist and body, I suggest that questions arise as to what new meanings and connections can be made between them, both conceptually and aesthetically. Following on from that, the significance and potential of the spaces and means of framing hair are called into inquiry, as are where these new meanings might occur or reside. To these ends I make a close analysis of the artworks in order to understand how potential meanings can be evoked or suggested.

Crucial to this research is an approach that rejects predetermined interpretations and definitions including fixities such as the dualism of gender, giving preference instead to fluid notions and possibilities, by treating meaning as a process rather than a

³ Mel Bochner, 'The Serial Attitude', *Artforum*, 6, 4, (December 1967), pp. 28-33, also reproduced in Mel Bochner, *Solar Systems and Rest Rooms: Writings and Interviews 1965-2007*, (Camb. Mass.: MIT Press, 2008), pp. 42-7. I explain various notions of the serial later in this chapter.

result. In this respect my approach has been informed by the recent writing of Marsha Meskimmon, among others, including her *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics* (2003), and *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination* (2011).⁴ Meskimmon sustains an approach in which she positions herself as a partner in a dialogue with women who make art rather than a privileged interpreter of art works. By reconceiving her methodology (in Deleuzian terms) through actions and process, her observations enable different articulations of female subjectivity.⁵

Although my chosen artists have exhibited to some extent in an international arena, only Gallagher has exhibited widely in both the US and Europe; the work of the other four artists has remained largely within a European context. Through this study I intend to show that their work is no less rich or thought provoking for its limited visibility to date. It might also be argued that their art retains a freshness from not being over-visited by historians or critics, and certainly provides a greater potential for research and contribution to knowledge. Soltau, Maher, Prendergast and Rijkeboer have used actual hair in their art while Gallagher has worked with printed images of hair. I shall argue that just as the practices of these artists can be seen to evolve over time, so can the ways they use or evoke hair. While Rijkeboer continues to combine it with other materials in her work, Soltau, Maher, Prendergast and Gallagher increasingly sustain its presence through metaphor and metonym.

It became apparent at the beginning of this research project that there are many more artists who use hair in their art practice than would be possible to include in any but a

⁴ See bibliography for full details.

⁵ Marsha Meskimmon, *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 2-4.

cursory survey. North American artists include Diane Jacobs, Victoria May, Kerry Vander Meer, Karin Stack, Kate Gilbert Miller, (all dates unknown), Anne Wilson (b. 1949), and Paula Santiago (b. 1969), and Doris Salcedo (b. 1958 Columbia), as well as the Cuban artist Ana Mendieta (1948-85). Wilson, Mendieta and Salcedo have been represented in critical terms perhaps more than others. In the United Kingdom, less well-known artists including Nicole Mollet, Nicola Donovan, Susie MacMurray (all dates unknown), Alice Anderson (b.1976), Emily Bates (b.1970), and Jemima Brown (b.1971) and the more prominent Chapman brothers, Jake and Dinos (b. 1966 and 1962), among others, also either reference hair or use it as a material in their practice. Other internationally acclaimed artists including Ron Mueck (b.1958 Australia, working in England), Mona Hatoum (b.1952 Lebanon, working in England), Kiki Smith (b.1954 Germany, lives in US), and Vanessa Beecroft (b. 1969 Italy, works in US), as well as the German artist Birgit Dieker (b. 1969), Wenda Gu (b.1955 China), Francis Alÿs (b.1959 Belgium), and Chiharu Shiota (b.1972 Japan), have also produced bodies of work that could have formed part of this research. It is plain from this list that many of the artists working with hair are women, and my interest in issues of gender and women's art has helped formulate my choice of artists. As this thesis will demonstrate there are clear reasons for this, but in brief, I was drawn to the various particular ways in which each referenced the body, particularly the female body. Rather than examining the work of artists with similar creative responses to hair, and which might reduce its scope as a motif, the work of the five artists I have chosen is very different, and this emphasizes the complexity of the topic. My chosen artists employ a variety of ways of presenting their work with hair and metaphors of hair, including drawing, painting, and sculpture. However a recurring genre in their work is installation art, which warrants a short explanation.

The tactile nature of hair and its relationship to the body arguably lends itself to more sculptural forms and installational configurations than it does to two-dimensionality.⁶ Because hair is a component of the physical body, it demonstrates the importance of the concept of embodiment through its manifestation as (part of) the body, and, by its symbolic and paradigmatic qualities.⁷ Kristine Stiles describes installation (together with video and performance) as art forms that differ from sculpture or painting in that these media produce what she describes as 'living art' that can more fully interact with social practices, environments and technologies.⁸ Claire Bishop makes a similar point when she describes installation as a 'decentred' aesthetic experience, one in which the viewing space is 'a living area'.⁹ That is, for Bishop and Stiles the descriptor 'living' is a predominant concern of installation, suggesting the active communication of social questions and considerations through the body or references to the body.

The term installation can be used to explain both 'a work of installation art' in which the various elements of a piece are unified into a single totality, and the installation of works of art within either specific or mutable environments that may be termed 'an installation'. In the first meaning the installation has a physical presence within the same space as the audience and as such immediately encourages a whole body experience rather than the visual, more centred viewing of the spectator in front of a painting or sculpture. Bishop suggests that although installation art offers different

⁶ An interesting exception to this is British artist Alfie West (1901-1985) who held the world record for splitting hairs into as many as eighteen parts. He used them in hair drawings that he framed and hung in his own museum. See Christopher Turner, 'Split Hairs', *Cabinet*, 40, (Winter 2010-2011), 104-5.

⁷ As a term, embodiment provides the concept with physical form. Incorporation brings the two elements together, directly referencing the corpus or body.

⁸ Kristine Stiles, 'I\Eye\Oculus: Performance, Installation, Video', in *Themes in Contemporary Art*, ed. by Gill Perry and Paul Wood, (Newhaven and London: Yale University Press in Association with The Open University, 2004), pp. 183-229 (p. 185).

⁹ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 11, 81.

types of audience participation, all are based on the premise of the sensations experienced by the embodied viewer within the installation or work of art that serves to activate the role of the spectator. *After the Dream* (2009), [Figure i] by Chiharu Shiota, from the exhibition titled *Walking In My Mind* held at the Hayward Gallery, London (June-September 2009), might be seen as an installation that demands such inter-action: black threads surround and touch the audience as they move through the work. Movement of the embodied audience is arguably a haptic experience in which stimulation of the senses of both touch and vision occurs. But even in relation to the non-installational artwork this argument is also useful in locating it as more than a solely visual object, because meaning is repeatedly enabled by the corporeal subject viewing it.¹⁰ Throughout this thesis I shall endeavour to show how meaning can shift and flow in the embodied experiences of an activated spectatorship. Many of the art works analysed in this study are either installations or take on the qualities of installation, in that they evoke both conceptual and sensual experiences in site-specific environments.¹¹

In my exploration of my chosen artists' negotiations with hair in relation to historical and social perceptions, common areas of interest emerge as recurrent themes in relation to both hair and the art works. A major concern is the artists' strategies and negotiations with notions of seriality, as well as the serial qualities of hair itself. I have deliberately chosen to pursue both these aspects of the serial in each chapter in preference to the numerous other possibilities of addressing hair that emerged from the research as recurring aspects in the work, such as biography, memory, the significance of the head, loss and trauma. Although secondary to this examination of

¹⁰ Meskimmon, (2003), p. 5.

¹¹ Arguably a post-Duchampian practice, but brought into common currency in the mid-twentieth century with *Arte Povera*, and Allan Kaprow's environmental art. See Stiles in Perry and Wood, (2004), pp. 183-229.

hair in the work of my chosen artists, my investigation of the serial demonstrates an approach that goes beyond that of Mel Bochner and Briony Fer, on whose theorisations of seriality I draw, as well as circling around Hélène Cixous' philosophical enquires into writing the body in endless ways that unsettle hierarchical structures, and which I discuss in the Methodology and Approach section of this Introduction.

One concept of the serial can be found in the repeated use of, for instance, an object, image or material; versions on a theme. In his essay 'The Serial Attitude' (1967), Mel Bochner described what he saw then as the differences between serial use, including working in series, and seriality as a method of working.¹² He argued that the former could be seen as a stylistic phenomenon, and the latter as an attitude, and it is this notion of seriality that I am concerned with in this thesis. Briony Fer more recently explored this latter point about a serial attitude, which she suggested arose in the aftermath of modernism, through a notion of the serial connected to difference and repetition, and which she argues enables new ways of producing and thinking about art. Her theorizations in *The Infinite Line: Remaking Art After Modernism* (2004) explore how seriality can be seen as generative of meaning as well as appealing to disconnections and disintegrations.¹³ Drawing on both Fer and Bochner, I will argue in Chapter Three, for example, that repetition of the photographic image, and a persistent diversity of line, including hair and threads, can be seen to enable aspects of disintegration and generation in Annegret Soltau's work.

¹² Bochner, (2008), p. 42.

¹³ Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Remaking Art after Modernism*, (New York and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 4.

Seriality together with gender issues, identity and the body – specifically the significance of the head – and memory as a marker of biography, are key themes throughout the thesis. The work of each of the five artists is also positioned where relevant within an extended aesthetic or visual cultural field to further develop increasingly prominent concerns with hair within the discipline of art history. A growing corpus of theoretical writing on hair in cultural theory, psychoanalysis, history and anthropology has inflected art historical discourses, and which in turn has variously informed this project.¹⁴

Why Hair?

My interest in hair and art practice arose out of earlier research into how artists Alice Maher and Ana Mendieta might be seen to reframe femininity, and which briefly touched on notions of veiling in relation to hair.¹⁵ I suggested then that acts of veiling may enable destabilisation of identity by blurring the boundaries between absence and presence, and that hair might provide a rich subject matter for further study in relation to identity. However, in that study I drew on Derrida's concept of *différance* to examine those notions of absence and presence, while for this present research my preference is for a Deleuzian approach that allows more fluidity in my aspiration to depart from dualistic thinking.

As I will argue in this thesis, hair has the ability to nurture fruitful and diverse paradigms for transference. Not only is it constitutive of the languages of culture,

¹⁴ I must also acknowledge the concurrent research for PhD theses, including those by Shir Aloni Yaari at the Courtauld Institute, London, whose topic is also hair and art history, and with whom I have had a productive exchange, and a historical project on hair and wigs by Emma Markiewicz at the University of Warwick.

¹⁵ Heather Hanna, 'Re-framing Femininity: *Informe*, Abjection and *Différance* in the Work of Ana Mendieta and Alice Maher', (unpublished master's thesis, The Open University, September 2007).

including myth, beauty and femininity, it is also a powerful medium through which metaphors can be inflected and sustained. As I will suggest, in combination with its historiography, the medium of hair and its simulacra in art practice might be seen to have the potential to challenge and subvert conceptions of feminine identity and some of the bastions of traditional painting and sculpture. For example, and as I more fully discuss in Chapter Two, Alice Maher's diverse treatment of hair in *Folt* (1993) [Figure 2.2] can be seen to both appeal to, and destabilize cultural perceptions of feminine styling. Moreover, her strategy of combining a non-traditional sculptural material (a quantity of actual hair) with the more traditional medium of drawing can be unsettling.

The body, as a site of living meaning, can indicate a contested subject in flux.¹⁶ That is to say, not only is the body a physical object within the world, but it is also a sentient and embodied location from where we communicate with, and constantly adjust to and influence, our environment; in other words, it is the locus of our ever changing physical and psychical identity. As an extension to the body, hair is its most visible sign, and so of considerable significance to notions of identity. Hair's characteristics, functions and associated meanings can also suggest somatic connections as it evokes nature and the organic. Moreover, its versatility enables its centrality within some socio-cultural discourses, through which it can play a pivotal role in suggesting a plurality of meanings and imagery within the domain of the body. Hair can be suggestive of the gendered body's desire for "orientating the wearer in his

¹⁶ See Amelia Jones's discussion of the body through her reading of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith, (New York: Routledge, 1962), in 'Body' in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. by Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 251-66 (pp. 260-1).

or her community and history.”¹⁷ Even as it is braided, coiled, coloured, extended or removed, each action or process seems to evoke associated stereotyping. The plaits of the ‘innocent’ girl, or the implied power directed on the shaved head stimulate issues of beauty and shame, and racial and cultural differences. As a metonym for the ‘whole person’ hair that is coloured can suggest and deny women’s intellectual capabilities, something often discussed in discourses of bloneness.¹⁸

It has also been argued that the more subversive hair is of societal norms, the greater its potential evocation of the liminality of the body’s boundaries. According to Julia Kristeva, its positioning as a liminal paring of the body, as well as its excess and, conversely, its lack, “disturbs identity, system, order.”¹⁹ This transitional state aligns hair with other body detritus and fluids echoing the notion of the abject body. In the following chapters I shall engage with Kristeva’s assertion that whilst hair is included among the rejected and abhorrent evidence of the body’s excess, its liminality may also facilitate the body’s desire to interface with the world.

Hair and Art Histories

The inescapable dialectic of hair, specifically associated with the female, can be traced throughout history in its symbolism and portrayals of rituals and adornment. Fifteenth-century European artists such as German sculptor Tilman Riemenschneider (1460-1531) and Italian painter Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) are among the many

¹⁷ Marina Warner, ‘Fur and Fleece: The Language of Hair’, in *Haare-Obsession und Kunst*, exh. cat. ed. by Roger Fayet, (Zurich: Museum Bellerive, 2000) pp. 9-20 (p. 10).

¹⁸ Molly Myerowitz-Levine ‘The Gendered Grammar of Ancient Mediterranean Hair’, in *Off With Her Head! The Denial of Women’s Identity in Myth, Religion and Culture*, ed. by Howard Eilberg-Schwarz, and Wendy Doniger, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 76-130 (p. 85).

¹⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4.

who have made use of the symbolism of hair. Riemenschneider's *Saint Mary Magdalen* (1490-2) visually depicts the saint repenting her immodesty by growing her hair, while Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (1482-86) can be seen to employ hair as a metaphor of virginal purity and beauty. From at least the sixteenth-century onwards, 'Western' thinking broadly speaking has associated hairiness with virility in men, but wantonness in women.²⁰ Blondenness as a symbol for virtue and innocence has been evoked repeatedly in visual and written portrayals of Goldilocks and Cinderella, while Rapunzel and Melisande have often been characterized through their tresses of flowing hair. But as Wendy Cooper argues, there are conflicting aspects of hair symbolism where loose uncut hair has also been seen as a metaphor for promiscuity.²¹ In literary depictions of the German folklore character Lorelei, for example, German composer Clemens von Brentano (1778-1842) was reputedly inspired by a journey he made along the Rhine in about 1801, to write a ballad about a beautiful sorceress who he named after the rocky outcrop Lore Lay.²² As a myth grew around the story, she later became known as the mermaid who combed her long hair while she sang, supposedly luring Rhine boatmen to their death on the rocks below her.

Some discussions of eighteenth-century visual representations of hair can provide a bridge to contemporary depictions and use of hair. Louisa Cross's study of William Hogarth's engraving *The Five Orders of Periwig* (1761), for instance, and the fashionable spectacle of hair in the eighteenth-century, highlights both the historical importance of the wig, and also the subordination of feminine styles to those of their

²⁰ I am using the term 'Western' here to refer to the histories and perceptions of social and ethical norms and traditions, as relating to white, mainly European thinking.

²¹ Wendy Cooper, *Hair: Sex Society Symbolism*, (London: Aldus, 1971), p. 67.

²² 'The Legend of the Lorelei', (31 July 2007) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A24145869>> [accessed 14 April 2011]

male counterparts.²³ Hair, as depicted in contemporary prints and paintings of the late eighteenth-century Britain, increased in its volume and eccentricity for both men and women. Wigs such as those Hogarth portrayed in the 1760s were associated with masculinity and public life, and varied as to the wearer's profession or leisure state. In the mid eighteenth-century women also followed fashionable styles (including wigs and hair pieces) but conversely were often expected to wear their own hair and appear 'natural'.²⁴ Men might be disparaged for wearing an inappropriate wig in terms of their social position, but as Amelia Rauser claims, women were chastised for their vanity and short-sightedness.²⁵ She argues that some prints of British caricaturist Matthew Darly (1720-78), for instance, criticised the role of 'unnatural' wigs as vehicles to promote deception (of the female face and body) by obscuring age and ugliness.²⁶ Broadly speaking, similar concerns do not however, appear to have been raised in relation to men. In these discourses men's hairstyles can be seen as part of masculinity's unrestricted public role, while femininity was constrained by associations with the body with the private and the personal. Disparities in commentaries at that time on the wearing of wigs by men compared to those worn by women thus highlights gender as a site of inequality in eighteenth-century trends. Through wigs, introduced by Charles II to the English court, hair's long and ambivalent associations with sexuality further emphasised the importance of the head as a visual metonym for identity in cartoons, painted portraits, prints and other forms of visual culture. Marcia Pointon, for instance, has explored connections between hairstyles and wigs and the symbolism of body posture including the position of the

²³ Louisa Cross, 'Fashionable Hair in the Eighteenth Century: Theatricality and Display', in *Hair: Styling, Culture and Fashion*, ed. by Geraldine Biddle-Perry and Sarah Cheang, (Oxford: Berg, 2008), pp. 15-26.

²⁴ Amelia Rauser, 'Sex and Sensibility: Hair in the Macaroni Caricatures of the 1770s', in Penny Howell Jolly, ed. *Hair: Untangling a Social History* (Skidmore College: Tang Museum and Art Gallery, 2004), pp. 29-37 (p. 31).

²⁵ Rauser, in Jolly, (2004), p. 31. See also Amelia Rauser, 'Hair, Authenticity and the Self-Made Macaroni', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38, 1, (Fall, 2004), 101-117.

²⁶ Rauser in Jolly (2004), p. 31, also Cross in Biddle-Perry and Cheang, (2008), p. 18.

head, which extended even to the placing and hanging of portraits.²⁷ The significance of gendered distinctions and the importance of the head in artistic practices are concerns that I raise throughout this thesis. In Chapter One, for example, I discuss Chrystl Rijkeboer's consideration of the dichotomies of male/female through the ways she uses hair and the head as an indicator of identity that both allows exploration as well as subversion of dualistic aspects of gender.

Drawing on these historical associations, *Wig/Cunt* (1990) by American artist and lecturer Millie Wilson (b.1948) [Figure ii], can be seen as a direct critique of Hogarth's *The Five Orders of Periwig*. Her ironic appropriation of male images of vanity and power invites reflections on the relative status of the female body. Wilson's juxtaposition can be seen to signal connections between Hogarth's caricaturing of masculinity (in the preposterous wigs), and the patriarchal reduction of women to what has been called one of the most offensive words in the English language.²⁸ I suggest that Wilson's borrowing from Hogarth enables differences to be shown between masculine discourses of demonstrating individuality through artifice and appendage, and a feminine dialogue of, and through, the body alone.²⁹ In her playful visual parallel she can also be seen to raise more serious questions about the stability of identity as a complex and often contentious issue. At the time of Wilson's *Wig/Cunt*, numerous artists had used the body as a living canvas, including the

²⁷ Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth Century England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 13-52.

²⁸ *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. by Amelia Jones, (London and New York, 2003), p. 387.

²⁹ Conversely, Wilson could also be argued as essentializing 'woman' as a site of artifice. Several artists including Ana Mendieta have been accused of essentializing the female body; Mendieta through her close references to 'Mother' earth. Because essentialism as a concept is reliant on inherent and stable characteristics of people or phenomena, the gendered implications for women are that man, through patriarchal law from as far back as the Greek philosophers, essentially subjugates them. British philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) distinguishes between a real and a nominal essence, the former implies unchanging meaning while the nominal is associated and generated through language. Uzgalis, William, "John Locke", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2010 Edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/locke/>> [accessed 18 June 2011]

Austrian artist Valie Export (b. 1940). Export used her breasts and pubic area as symbols of female sexuality, appealing to socio-cultural media exploitation of the female body. In her performance *Genitalpanik*, (1969), [Figure iii], she reveals not the actual flesh of her genital parts, but a possibility, or secret place veiled by pubic hair. What emerges from this photograph (part of a record of her performance) is that she takes control of her body when she chooses to parade her genitalia at eye level to the viewing audience in a cinema. A few years earlier than Export, Japanese artist Shigeko Kubota (b.1937), raised some related issues when she created an action painting *Vagina Painting* (1965) [Figure iv], by attaching a brush to her crotch, questioning the primacy of the male artist and his media, while reframing the status and categories of art.³⁰ American Carolee Schneemann (b.1939) later challenged representations of female sexuality, female subjectivity and genitalia in *Interior Scroll* [Figure v], (first performed 29 August 1975).³¹ I suggest that her performance can be seen to raise issues of the female body as a site of mystery or privacy by bringing female sexuality and genitalia into the public domain. Amongst various issues with which Schneemann was reputedly concerned was that of exploring the female body as a material site for creative energy, as well as its potential for the locus and subject of the work.³² I suggest that the legacy of this point remains relevant to contemporary explorations of the female body, including those of my chosen artists.

By the 1970s, feminism had made its influence felt in art practices and aesthetic dialogues to the extent that corporeality of the body had become increasingly visible,

³⁰ Gill Perry, 'The Expanding Field: Ana Mendieta's *Siluetas* series', in *Frameworks for Modern Art*, ed. by Jason Gaiger, (London and New York: Yale University Press in Association with The Open University, 2003) pp. 152-205.

³¹ Jenni Sorkin, 'Carolee Schneemann', in *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, exh. cat. ed. by Lisa Gabrielle Mark, (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 295-6.

³² Elizabeth Manchester, (November 2003), *Interior Scroll 1975*

<<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=76319&tabview=text>> [accessed 22 July 2011]

although sometimes with associated ‘accusations’ of ‘essentialism’.³³ Identifying women with an ‘essentialist’ politics of the body has been challenged as reducing the female to the biological specificity of her body. However, as Janet Wolff says: “Biology is always overlaid and mediated by culture, and the ways in which women experience their bodies is largely a product of social and political processes.”³⁴ I am suggesting that although essentialism might be defined etymologically, this does not take into account its cultural and historical contexts; it is subject to the discursive practices in which it exists, and as such can be seen as an active process. Notions of ‘woman’ have been posited as a generic opposite, or other, to how the male perceives women as having certain inherent and distinctive qualities that are stable and ‘natural’. In this ideology dominant (male-based) cultural and historical attitudes and values are naturalised so that they appear as normative representations of women, and through them, particular understandings of women come into being and are reinforced. Thus ideology and representation are inextricably connected, the one unable to function without the other; both are constructed of signs or perceptual codes that are active participants in the construction of realities. Without ideologies that we can recognise or challenge, some of the meaning of images, as representations of particular ideologies, might be lost or inaccessible. I am informed by the work of Lisa Tickner here when I suggest that the material circumstances of an art work may provide an image, but the power relations of ideologies are structured in ways so that the image becomes more than the material; in other words it becomes a representation.³⁵

³³ Marsha Meskimmon, ‘Chronology Through Cartography: Mapping 1970s Feminist Art Globally’, in Mark, (2007), pp. 322-335, or *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art*, ed. by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin, (London and New York: Merrell, 2007).

³⁴ Janet Wolff, ‘Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics’, in Jones, (2003), pp. 414-26 (pp. 420-2).

³⁵ Lisa Tickner, ‘Sexuality and/in Representation: Five British Artists’, in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Donald Preziosi, Oxford: Oxford University Press, (1998), pp. 356-69 (p. 357).

The women in this study belong to a generation of artists who, as described by Susan Krane, “came of age in the late 1980s and forever changed the muscular practice of sculpture with their new interest in nature and a penchant for painstaking craftsmanship, domestic references and psychological metaphor.”³⁶ Where earlier artists in the 1960s and 1970s made visible the female body as never before, this appears to have initiated an escalating occurrence and use of the body and hair in subsequent art practices and their histories. The work of my chosen artists coincides with a period of feminism often concerned with addressing so-called poststructuralist issues. Such considerations generally include the exploration of relationships between the structuring principles of a given thing with its margins. As I show in the following chapters, these liminal locations are not seen as dualistic sites of exclusion but significant for their own relevance, as differences, variations and places of transformation. Philosophers Gilles Deleuze (1925-95) and Félix Guattari (1930-92) inform my understanding of this when they contend that the self is a liminal location; “a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities.”³⁷ They also suggest that, neither subject nor object, multiplicities establish rhizomatic connections; lines of flight, connections and discontinuities.³⁸ Their reasoning is underpinned by an anti-dialectical way of thinking. For Deleuze in particular, difference and becoming are critical to his corpus, and his theories are relevant to my approach. He argues in *Difference and Repetition* (1994) for difference as being grounded in itself, rather than in resemblance or opposition to identity. That is, rather than difference being understood as a re-presentation of a particular set of circumstances, for instance, a

³⁶ Susan Krane, ‘Petah Coyne: Above and Beneath the Skin’, (Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, 2006), <<http://www.smoca.org/exhibit.php?id=121>> [accessed 8 May 2009]

³⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi, (London and New York: Continuum, 2004b), p. 275.

³⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, (2004b), pp. 8-9, 13.

historical event that is portrayed in different ways in several films or works of literature, Deleuze examines energies around difference that are fundamental to the creation of the event. He says at one point in his debate:

“In every case repetition is difference without a concept. But in one case, the difference is taken to be only external to the concept; it is difference between objects represented by the same concept...In the other case, the difference is internal to the Idea, it unfolds as pure movement, creative of a dynamic space and time which correspond to the idea.”³⁹

The ways Deleuze theorises ‘becoming’ as the continual movement of unique events of difference between systems and structures also informs some of my thinking as I explore the work of my chosen artists in discourses that include among others art, science, geography, and technology. Deleuze grounds his dense and sometimes contentious ideas in a concept of repetition that refuses stasis. Seriality as a manifestation of repetition in, for example, an art work or piece of music, can be seen as being based in difference, albeit difference in itself, not one that relies on dissimilarity from something other, although of course that aspect may be visible/audible too. I am not suggesting that my chosen artists have been directly informed by specific feminist or poststructuralist theories, but rather it should be stated at the outset that some of these issues can be seen to have impacted on or indirectly inspired the art works and some of their critics to a greater or lesser extent, albeit among other factors. They have also informed my interpretation of their work.

For my part, I approach feminist issues through concerns about identity and the female body, and specifically in relation to hair. As Warner says; “Meanings of all kinds flow through the figures of women, and they often do not include who she

³⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), trans. by Paul Patton, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994a), pp. 23-4.

herself is.”⁴⁰ These ideas have to some extent informed my thinking in the following chapters. In Chapter Four, for instance, I discuss how Kathy Prendergast’s work can be seen to explore ideas of female identity as a transient site of meaning in relation to issues of landscape or mapping, although not one that excludes other possible meanings. Joanna Frueh’s inclusive approach to feminism, where visible differences associated with ageing seek to relocate the female body as vital and dynamic rather than repulsive, has also informed my approach to the diverse ways of interpreting the female body and identity.⁴¹ Frueh seeks to redress the stereotypes that have been attached to the old/er woman, such as witch or hag that may have arisen in response to perceptions of changed or deteriorating physical flesh. I argue in Chapters Three and Five that Annegret Soltau and Ellen Gallagher, respectively, show how radicalized images of the female body can expose preconceptions of the feminine, even though as in some of Soltau’s work, it led to censorship.

I suggest also that Griselda Pollock’s discussion about framing feminism in the late 1980s still resonates in the twenty-first century. She said: “The real excitement of feminist theory and the cultural analyses it currently draws upon is the debunking of mystifying ideas about creativity, the artist, art. Instead we work (artists and historians alike) with a recognition of skills, insights, sensibilities.”⁴² This idea of challenging notions of the primacy of the (usually male) artist as genius is an aspect that I engage with throughout the thesis, whether through the artists’ stated intentions, or through their material practices, and indeed I argue in Chapter Two that Alice Maher’s work raises such questions.

⁴⁰ Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), p. 331.

⁴¹ Joanna Frueh, ‘Visible Difference: Women Artists and Ageing’, in *New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action*, ed. by Joanna Frueh, Cassandra L. Langer, and Arlene Raven, (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), pp. 264-288.

⁴² Griselda Pollock, ‘Framing Feminism’, in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, ed. by Hilary Robinson, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 207-12 (p. 209).

It will also be argued in this study that a later or 'second' wave of feminism enabled a more playful, although no less serious articulation of the body. Drawing on mass culture as a site of mediation in her work, Ellen Gallagher, for instance, cannibalizes fashion and beauty magazines to critique the artificiality of wigs through the medium of Plasticine. I will suggest that her playful use of this through its direct referent to childhood creativity, comments on assumptions about the materials of 'high art' (as Kubota can be seen to in the mid-1960s) as well as the contrived and the artificial, within discourses of racial and gendered significance.⁴³ Maher, on the other hand, explores connections between femininity and some of the possible spaces of play through her uses of hair and the girl-child.

It became apparent early in this research project that hair can sustain notions of seriality, both as a serial material and also through its place in popular trends and fashions of hairstyles. When Andy Warhol (1928-97) created his *Marilyn* prints and paintings in the 1960s, he can be seen to demonstrate through his use of serial images of the film star Marilyn Monroe (1926-62), conventions of mass production including repetition, systematic processes and modular or grid principles. In these works the idea of an original 'Marilyn' is constantly deferred through repetition, at the same time as suggesting the consumption and commodification of a particular woman, image and hairstyle. Thus the embodied subject appears to be manufactured, something emphasised in Warhol's use of non-representational colour of the head, face and hair. Mel Bochner describes the 'unnaturalness' of serial art as; "heightened

⁴³ Jo Anna Isaak, *Feminism and Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), looks at the work of artists from several continents within the framework of laughter.

artificiality due to the clearly visible and simply ordered structure.”⁴⁴ The multiplicitous nature of hair and its importance as a marker of identity enable the artist to align repetition with the aesthetic.⁴⁵ Any dispassion that is sometimes associated with repetitive processes is negated by allusions to the personal in the hair, as I will demonstrate in my examination of Soltau’s photographic images in Chapter Five. I will also argue that in art practice seriality can offer the possibility of deferral of the work through revisions, as well as development of narratives through the mechanical or laborious repetition of process. When hair and serial processes combine (in an artwork or action), the limits and frameworks within which the work are sited are in complex relationships with the potential of hair for repetition and revision. As suggested by Fer, ‘dispassion’ may be related to the ‘personal’ in an intriguing way:

“Far from objective or neutral, seriality is related to something like an excess of selfhood, not in the sense of the individual subject of course, but a pathological sense of a subject who has lost their bearings to an outside.”⁴⁶

In the following chapters I intend to probe the usefulness of this idea of ‘excess of selfhood’ that Fer describes. I will focus on the concentrated obsessions, and responses to hair and femininity in the work of my chosen artists.

Hair: Literature Review

Because hair touches so many disciplines from the more scientific fields of medicine, psychoanalysis, psychology, physiology, health and beauty, to those of anthropology,

⁴⁴ Bochner, (2008), p. 40.

⁴⁵ Meskimmon provides useful insights into aesthetics in connection with female subjectivity, See Meskimmon, (2003), pp. 131-3.

⁴⁶ Briony Fer, ‘Hanne Darboven: Seriality and the Time of Solitude’, in *Conceptual Art: Theory. Myth, and Practice*, ed. by Michael Corris, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 223-34 (p. 224).

history, sociology and art, literature on hair is disparate. Its diverse and multi-disciplinary nature defies effective categorization, and consequently overlaps several categories, underlining the complications, intricacies and nuances inherent in the topic. In order to manage it more easily I have grouped it in four main areas: historical, mythical and folkloric; anthropological; the beauty industry; and lastly within art history.⁴⁷

Historical, Mythical and Folkloric Uses of Hair

Encyclopaedic literature on hair mainly discusses it in broad terms, and is valuable for its general overview of the subject. These texts include *Fashions in Hair: The First Five Thousand Years* (1965) by Richard Corson, Robin Bryer's *The History of Hair: Fashion and Fantasy Down the Ages* (2000), and *Encyclopedia of Hair* (2006) by Victoria Sherrow. Wendy Cooper's *Hair: Sex, Society, Symbolism* (1971), discusses biological, social and symbolic aspects of hair, and from folk cures of hair sandwiches to the fetishistic collection of pubic hair. Her suggestion that the biological mapping of hair on our bodies invests it with sexual significance is a relevant point in relation to Chapter Four where I examine Kathy Prendergast's metaphorical suggestions of hair in her mapping of the female body.⁴⁸ Cooper's text however, is often too general to be of detailed use to this research, although her wide-ranging scope and literary enthusiasm for the topic provides evidence of a broader popular interest in hair and the body in the early 1970s; an interest that was subsequently appropriated and inflected by various feminist approaches.

In comparison with Cooper, who pays some brief attention to hair and fairytales, Marina Warner writing in the 1990s, examines in detail the cultural and historical

⁴⁷ Texts mentioned are listed in the Bibliography.

⁴⁸ Cooper, (1971), p. 7.

facets of hair in fairytales, myth and art. Warner's text *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (1995), arguably dominates this genre of literature, and is also informed by aspects of feminism. She discusses the language of hair through a plenitude of symbolic gendered meanings, including hairiness, bears, beards, bloneness, cropping, hairstyles, rituals and traditions. Her examinations of hair span a historical timeline including Virgil's *Aeneid*, biblical narratives, lives of the Saints, Perrault's eighteenth-century retelling of 'Donkeyskin', the many fairytales of the Grimm brothers, Freud, and contemporary culture. Painting, sculpture, prints, illustrative art, film and advertisements all command her scholarly attention as she examines hair in relation to sexual attraction, the beast within, and the traditions of the fairytale. In cultural terms Warner's interests and discussions of hair in general offer my research a depth of specialist knowledge that is a constant well from which to draw information and stimulation. Her treatment of the languages of the imagination that is vital to storytelling, and discussions of the role of women in promulgating, for instance, the ethics of fairytales and myths, and familial and gendered relationships, are particularly relevant to this project.⁴⁹ Issues of hairiness and bloneness have also informed my own approach and explorations of the work of Chrystl Rijkeboer in Chapter One and Alice Maher in Chapter Two respectively.

Anthropological Literature

Anthropological literature on hair from the 1950s, specifically *The Unconscious Significance of Hair* (1951), by Charles Berg, and those who have since drawn on his writing, in particular, Howard Eilberg-Schwarz and Wendy Doniger's *Off With Her Head!: The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture* (1995), Trevor Millum's article 'Long Hair: Taboo in England' (1970), and Anthony

⁴⁹ Warner, (1995), pp. xvi, xix, 12-26.

Synnott's 'Shame and Glory: a Sociology of Hair' (1987), all exploit a more psychoanalytical approach. Berg treats hair as a site of unconscious conflict, rooted in castration anxiety. He argues that men go through a daily private ritual of 'castration' of the face by shaving in order to be "clean and free from anal guilt."⁵⁰ He suggests that although women may be more anxious about their hair, paradoxically they are more defiant about it since they tidy it in public. Either way, his discussions of hair, with close Freudian references, reduce it to a fetish based on strictly dualistic notions of gender, this latter aspect being antithetical to my approach in this thesis. Synnott's discussion of hair, as a dialectical site of symbolism that favours norms, sees differences as variations from a standard, which he concludes can be explained in three polar oppositions: "gender (male-female), ideology (centre-deviant) and physique (head-body)."⁵¹ Although a clearly worked argument, Synnott's dualistic approach also runs counter to my anti-hierarchical position.

In the volume that Eilberg-Schwarz and Doniger edit, the focus is on the female head as a site of socio-cultural meanings. The various gendered themes of these essays have been a valuable stimulus for ideas in my research, although they draw on the anthropological at the expense of the aesthetic and visual. Molly Myerowitz Levine's chapter 'The Gendered Grammar of Ancient Mediterranean Hair' constructively separates the operation of hair into the metonymic and metaphoric. Her discussion of the metonymic power of hair in the life/death narrative as it signifies the whole person, and her argument that hair may be regarded as interchangeable with genitalia, (taking Berg's fetishistic claims for hair in a different direction), offers stimulating

⁵⁰ Charles Berg, *The Unconscious Significance of Hair*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1951), p. 41.

⁵¹ Anthony Synnott, 'Shame and Glory: a Sociology of Hair', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 38, 3, (1987), 381-413 (p. 410).

ideas to this study.⁵² Levine's approach to the gendered grammar of hair proffers, amongst many other points, valuable insights into wig shops in B'nai-Brak, Israel. Ayana Byrd and Lori L. Tharps's chronological examination of black hair, *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* (2001) traces its changing state from fifteenth century Africa right up to present day America. Their documentation of these cultural histories provides key information for the final chapter of my thesis where I explore Gallagher's treatment of black hair.

Analysing the Beauty Industry

The historiography of hair within the beauty industry highlights a dilemma between hair and what is perceived as beauty (by the Western world and possibly further, regardless of age, sex or gender). On the one hand, in the attainment of 'beauty' (a concept widely regarded as governed by patriarchal discourses of power), women in particular have succumbed to hairstyling and treatments to achieve specific desired goals. These may include an adjudged increase in femininity, bloneness, long tresses of hair, chemical treatments, straightening, and so on. However, for some women yielding to social expectations raises the dual issues of loss of corporeal subjectivity and reliance on debatable products and treatments, so that attainment to notions of beauty may to a certain extent be seen as taboo and demeaning. *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power and Black Women's Consciousness* (2000) by Ingrid Banks, teases out many of these issues in her ethnography of the everyday life and practice of African American women and hair.⁵³ Her interviewees provide useful insights into bloneness in relation to blackness, and black hair as a site of empowerment. In some ways Banks'

⁵² Myerowitz-Levine recounts how dummies for female wigs must wear sunglasses to reduce the erotic impact of so much visible female hair, in Eilberg-Schwarz and Doniger, (1995), pp. 76-130 (p. 77).

⁵³ See also Banks' review of literature situating hair in academia, in black culture, and in relation to gender and race, Ingrid Banks, *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power and Black Women's Consciousness*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 4-18.

approach and the questions she asks of her participants: “Is hair associated with power in any way?” and “Do African women have a choice or voice?” are shaped by her own race and gender.⁵⁴ This connection between Banks and her interviewees and their insights, are useful in informing my examination of Gallagher’s work and her choice of black magazine images, albeit the latter are passive representations of black women rather than active embodied participants. Furthermore, Banks articulates that she could not occupy a neutral space in her project, something I have also borne in mind, particularly in relation to Gallagher.⁵⁵

Several of the texts I have already mentioned examine the topic of bloneness, including Cooper, Banks, Warner, and also Joanna Pitman in her book *On Blondes*, (2003). Laine Michelle Burton’s doctoral thesis ‘The Blonde Paradox: Power and Agency Through Feminine Masquerade and Carnival’ (2006),⁵⁶ investigating the complex and contested myths of bloneness finds it to be an agency of power as well as a site of paradox. Burton draws on Joan Riviere’s essay ‘Womanliness as Masquerade’ (dating from 1929), to investigate artist Vanessa Beecroft’s (b. 1969, Italy) use of blonde wigs in her performances.⁵⁷ She proposes that innocence and vulnerability historically associated with bloneness can subvert and transgress feminine stereotyping, and this has been useful to my research generally, and specifically to my examinations of the work of Rijkeboer and Gallagher. Pamela Church Gibson also examines notions of bloneness in the popular culture surrounding footballers and their wives, in ‘Concerning Bloneness: Gender, Ethnicity, Spectacle and Footballer’s Wives’, in *Hair: Styling, Culture and Fashion*,

⁵⁴ Banks, (2000), p. 19.

⁵⁵ Banks, (2000), p. 164.

⁵⁶ Laine Michelle Burton, ‘The Blonde Paradox: Power and Agency Through Feminine Masquerade and Carnival’, (unpublished doctoral thesis, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, 2006).

⁵⁷ Joan Riviere, ‘Womanliness as Masquerade’, in *Psychoanalysis and Female Sexuality*, ed. by Hendrik Marinus Ruitenbeek, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1966), pp. 209-220.

(2008), edited by Geraldine Biddle-Perry and Sarah Cheang. Gibson concludes that where (naturally) blonde hair was once a symbol of racial purity, this Aryan fantasy has been appropriated by both black and white footballers through hair bleaching. Some high profile white footballers, including the English player David Beckham, have adopted black hair styling through plaited cornrows.⁵⁸ Gibson raises some interesting points here that again inform my explanation of Rijkeboer's practices of mixing hair colours, and also aspects of Gallagher's work where she draws attention to notions of hybridity through black and white hairstyles. Hybridity as a term arises from biological ideas of the crossing of two species in which characteristics of both species are combined in varying measures; humanity constantly recreates itself through this. As a metaphor in some post-colonial theories hybridity can refer to cultural and ethnic interactions and exchanges. However, as Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk warn, hybridity is not simply about unproblematic cultural exchange of coloniser and colonised.⁵⁹ Its adoption in post-colonial theory has shown it to be a disputed term of some complexity; Paul Gilroy, for instance, suggests a dilemma between 'cultural nationalism' and the theorisation of concepts such as hybridity, which to the ethnic absolutists would be "unsatisfactory ways of naming the processes of cultural mutation."⁶⁰ Homi Bhabha draws on notions of translation and negotiation to explore hybridity as a third space that comes into being when cultures and identities meet and blend, thereby challenging and displacing "our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force." Both Bhabha and

⁵⁸ Biddle-Perry and Cheang, (2008), pp. 141-8.

⁵⁹ Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to its Methods*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 230-2.

⁶⁰ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 2. See also Niru Ratnam, 'Art and Globalisation', in Perry and Wood (2004), pp. 276-313, (p. 209)

Gilroy's explorations have underpinned my understanding of hybridity in this thesis.⁶¹

Hair in Art History

The final and arguably most relevant aspect of the historiography of hair to this study is found in the art historical literature. In 2004, a complete issue of *Eighteenth-Century Studies* guest edited by Angela Rosenthal, was devoted to scholarship on hair that drew from social, cultural and art historical perspectives, (authors include Gill Perry, Margaret Powell and Joseph Roach, Joannes Endres, Nina Gelbart, Christiane Holm, Amelia Rauser, and Rosenthal). This writing extends beyond the more generalized texts briefly discussed above to focus on hair within specific instances and signs. Of these articles Perry's 'Staging Gender and Hairy Signs: Representing Dorothy Jordan's Curls', (2004),⁶² has been a useful reference point for Johann Herder's eighteenth-century discourse on the form of hair given to Classical sculpture, and I draw on this in Chapter Two in relation to the various suggestions and forms of hair in Maher's work.⁶³ Rauser's article on the authenticity of hair has also been pertinent to my historical contextualisation of hair earlier in this Introduction.⁶⁴

Biddle-Perry and Cheang's anthology has continued in the footsteps of the *Eighteenth-Century Studies* issue on hair in its scope and depth. Apart from Gibson's essay mentioned above, this tripartite book focuses on the history of hair, hair and

⁶¹ Homi K. Bhabha, 'Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences', in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 206-12.

⁶² Gill Perry, 'Staging Gender and Hairy Signs: Representing Dorothy Jordan's Curls', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38, 1, (2004), 145-163.

⁶³ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream*, ed. and trans. by Jason Gaiger, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). [Originally published in German as *Plastik* in 1778.]

⁶⁴ Rauser, (2004), 101-117.

identity, and finally representations of hair within the cultural genres of art, fashion, film, literature and performance. Each chapter engages critically with its subject to develop appreciation and understanding of the socio-cultural implications of hair. Leila McKellar's 'Hairpieces: Hair, Identity, and Memory in the Work of Mona Hatoum', is particularly relevant in that it raises several points that find echoes in my examination of Soltau's responses as an artist to fears and losses that can occur during and after pregnancy.⁶⁵ McKellar's discussion of Hatoum's (b. 1952 Lebanon) *Van Gogh's Back* (1995) also advances an argument that draws on nature and art to examine perceptions of the male and female nude, and the possible roles of hair as an artistic medium; points that also arise in this thesis.

Concurrent with academic literature on hair, exhibitions centred on hair and their catalogues have been more prevalent in America than Europe. The Minnesota Arts Exhibition Programme's *Hair Stories* (2000), with an essay by Rob Silberman, explores the personal, cultural, and mythological significance of hair. *Hair: Untangling a Social History* (2004), edited by Penny Howell Jolly, and published by the Tang Museum and Art Gallery, Skidmore College, arose from a multi-disciplinary series of papers on hair imagery in Western culture. Jolly's essay 'Hair Power' explores aspects of memory and mourning; key themes that run through much of my own research. *Hair Raising* (2006) hosted by San José Institute of Contemporary Art featured twelve artists who explored issues of mortality, fetishism, social heterogeneity and social differences, as well as hair's physicality and materiality.⁶⁶ *Hair on Fire* (2009) at the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, Charleston, focused on the cultural diversity of hair including its rich metaphorical

⁶⁵ Biddle-Perry and Cheang, (2008), pp. 169-181.

⁶⁶ No catalogue is available for this exhibition but a preview of the artworks is accessible at <<http://www.sjica.org/exhibitions/Hair/HairArt.htm>> [accessed 6 July 2009]

possibilities.⁶⁷ Jolly's curation of the exhibition at the Tang Museum and Art Gallery, for instance, assembled imagery associated with hair in Western culture, with exhibits ranging from the sixteenth century to the first decade of the twentieth century. Mark Sloan, who curated the Halsey Institute exhibition, selected contemporary artists working with hair in very diverse ways: a clipping station, modification of prints of hairstyles, drawings of hairy subjects, and houses made from hair extensions found in the recent New Orleans flood following hurricane Katrina in 2005, are some of them. In England, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery hosted an interactive exhibition, *Community Stories From Birmingham* between July 2008 and March 2009, investigating the significance of hair to identity. These examples of exhibitions about hair demonstrate a direct connection between its histories in art practices (in prints, painting and sculpture) as well as its continued relevance in the more embodied art practices of performance and installation. Hair's potential as an aesthetic theme or trope accordingly positions my research within a field that is fruitful in both historical and contemporary terms.

The imagery in Herlinde Koelbl's photographic documentation of hair and the body entitled *Hair* (2007), has also been of inspiration to this thesis, as has the documentary film *Good Hair* directed by Jeff Stilson (born c. 1959) and featuring comedian Chris Rock.⁶⁸ Rock probes issues of 'good' hair in the African American market, teasing out how black women currently negotiate complex issues surrounding black hair, and which is particularly relevant to my exploration of Gallagher's work in Chapter Five. A proliferation of hair imagery within contemporary visual culture also extends from 2-dimensional artworks, sculpture,

⁶⁷ Mark Sloan, 'Hair on Fire', *Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art*, 2009, <http://halsey.cofc.edu/exhibitions/2009/03_hof_essay.php> [accessed 6 July 2009]

⁶⁸ Herlinde Koelbl, *Hair*, (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2007). *Good Hair*, dir. Jeff Stilson, Lionsgate Home Entertainment, (2009).

and installation, to performance art such as that by Moti Roti. Their *Wigs of Wonderment*, first performed in 1995, challenged 'Western' notions of beauty as participants were individually guided through what has been described by Dorothy Rowe as a 'cultural makeover', and included wigs, make-up and clothes.⁶⁹

Methodology and Approach

This thesis is based on an assumption that hair is both a physical materialisation of the body and, through its metaphorical associations to the body and identity, is also overtly and subtly present in many aspects of the contemporary lived experience.

I have broadly situated my research within poststructuralist concepts and concerns which question cultural, aesthetic and discipline boundaries and structures, informed by various feminist approaches. Julia Kristeva's (b.1941-) articulation of the liminal and the abject can be seen to open up questions of identity and subjectivity and has been an important influence in my considerations of hair as an abject body part.⁷⁰

Hélène Cixous's (b.1937-) 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1975) has been central to my thinking of women who are artists 'writing' themselves and the richness of their various discourses.⁷¹ She advocates speaking from the female body: "Write your self. Your body must be heard," and, describing women speaking, she continues, "Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare....She draws her story into history."⁷²

I find that Cixous offers the body as a space of dialogue for the feminine that is no longer considered liminal, and which Susan Sellers says; "refuses to appropriate or annihilate the other's difference in order to construct the self;" something I draw on

⁶⁹ See Dorothy Rowe, 'Performing Race and Transgender in the Work of moti roti', in Perry, (2004), pp. 138-55 (p. 142).

⁷⁰ Kristeva, (1982).

⁷¹ Cixous, (Summer 1976).

⁷² Cixous, (Summer 1976), pp. 880-1.

throughout the thesis.⁷³ To some extent this argument marries with Marsha Meskimmon's approach of 'encounters of difference' rather than oppositional positions in the articulation of female subjectivity.⁷⁴ These encounters are inevitably qualified by what Meskimmon describes as the 'masculine-normative values' of past histories, but rather than rewriting art histories with feminine-normative values (and following Meskimmon), this thesis endeavours to find spaces of improvisation and variation that do not rely on the dualisms and shape of more established histories of art. Deleuze's complex notion of difference and repetition has also been an important reference point throughout the thesis. Finally, although theories of gender and difference are not addressed *per se*, I have found Judith Butler's theorisations of performativity to be of value when considering notions of identity and race.

It might be argued that the approaches of some of these theorists and philosophers may not be compatible, and it is important to recognise this here. However, I argue that commonalities do emerge from these sometimes diverse theorisations (albeit in different ways and methodologies), in that they can all be seen to acknowledge flow, movement or exchange (as opposed to stasis) in which, for instance, dualisms of gender or race can be displaced, and rethought of as multiple and diverse. These overarching issues will be examined in relation to the artworks and to the conceptions of identity that they suggest. In the following chapters I assert my case for 'borrowing' and meshing together some of these seemingly oppositional strands. I argue for an approach that is layered and multivalent, in which close reading of texts and images can enable interpretations to accumulate in a rich tapestry where exchange and movement are privileged. Romi Crawford posits an interesting notion of *jouissance*

⁷³ Susan Sellers, *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. xxix.

⁷⁴ Meskimmon, (2003), p. 6.

as satisfying both the eye and the mind.⁷⁵ *Jouissance*, as conceived by Julia Kristeva, simultaneously conveys perceptions of excesses of physicality and spirituality, which rather than being dichotomous, can be argued as intertwined and somewhere between the abject and the sublime. My premise in this thesis is that hair as a subject in process can simultaneously be seen as a language (of the body and therefore of identity) with its own embodied physical characteristics, and as such can be a rich source and carrier of meaning. This enables my arguments in the following chapters to find new interpretations of the ways in which women who are artists frame hair in their practices, and what these might mean to the embodied viewer.

Overview of Thesis Chapters

The five chapters of the thesis form the main body of this research, and in order to avoid either a chronological or hierarchical approach to the artists and their work, I have located my exploration of the work of the oldest artist considered in the thesis – Annegret Soltau – as the central chapter. The other chapters radiate forwards or backwards from this, since a textual format does not allow for any other ways of rhizomatic diffusion, and which broadly corresponds with my approach. Each chapter examines the work of one of my chosen artists, who all engage with different strategies and art practices with hair. Many of their works encompass notions of seriality as well as the everyday, for which Briony Fer suggests serial repetition can open new terrains, as well as expanding our ways of looking at things.⁷⁶ It seemed important to begin this study with the work of an artist who has been obsessed with the physical materiality and excesses of hair throughout her artistic career. To this end

⁷⁵ From my notes, made during a gallery talk between Ellen Gallagher and Romi Crawford at Tate Liverpool on 8 April 2010 during the exhibition *Afro Modern: Journeys Through The Black Atlantic*, (29 January-25 April 2010).

⁷⁶ Fer, (2004), p. 3.

Chapter One explores Chrystl Rijkeboer's preoccupation with hair as the principal medium through which she investigates her central concern, that is, the dichotomy of good and evil. To date, her work has not been theorised in any depth, and I begin by unravelling the significance of visits she made to former concentration camps early in her artistic career, and their impact on her work. Although parts of this chapter are historically grounded in relation to issues arising around and from the enormous and still-expanding topic of the Holocaust, it has not been possible in the space of the thesis to do more than draw on those areas that are specifically relevant to my argument. By tracing how Rijkeboer uses hair to tease out complexities in the oppositional terms of good and evil through metaphoric and metonymic associations to identity and the body, I investigate themes of trauma, the family, and fairytale. I also consider her gendered position as she examines ethical issues such as veiling and disclosure, and racial discrimination. The final section of the chapter probes the significance of hair as a site of serial cloning and archiving where I argue that she uses hair as a political tool to question what we understand by tolerance, and the impact of choices. Her manipulation of the commonplace or domestic, such as a chair, or balaclava, often encourages new ways of looking and evokes other more sinister meanings.

I begin Chapter Two by considering Alice Maher's preoccupation with a notion of the serial through her collection and uses of ephemeral materials including hair, and which are sometimes associated with the domestic spaces of women. I show that although Maher has used actual hair only briefly, hair imagery and hair substitutes such as flax have remained important in her work. By examining her fascination with layering meanings I argue that she also challenges conceptions of women who are artists in Ireland as she openly defies a single interpretation and simple

understandings of both her art and women. I suggest that Maher engages with these issues and her audience through her repeated questioning of myth and fairytale, including her version of a girl-child as an enigmatic and fluid concept of identity. I draw on Deleuze's notion of becoming as productive flows in themselves in this chapter to theorise some of the ways Maher approaches her art practices. Allusions might be drawn in many of Maher's works to Roman Catholicism, such as in her use of thorns (see *House of Thorns* 1995, Figure 2.5), and also in relation to how she and her work travel across geographical, religious, and political divisions of Ireland, for instance, during the making of *Keep* (1992) [Figure 2.1]. However, others including Fionna Barber have theorized this aspect to some extent, and my concerns in this chapter draw on the more contemporary histories associated with installation, serial collecting, and layering of meaning.

Chapter Three focuses on the work of Annegret Soltau and her position as an artist at the beginning of her career in 1970s Germany, and which is now of increasing interest to younger generations of artists and historians. Much of the literature on her work is in German, and this chapter is only the second text on her work in English. I examine what Soltau regards as the haptic, and her strategies to enable us to 'feel' what the female body experiences in its life cycle, particularly trauma and isolation. I proceed by exploring how she achieves this through her framing of hair and its simulacra of cobwebs, threads and line. Discrepancies between the inner/outer body and its fragmentation and erasure are discussed, as is her stitching together of these fragments into 'new' bodies, and what these might mean. Although it might have been possible to historicise Soltau's work through aspects of the Holocaust, for instance, the degradation of the female body, that argument might not have enabled me to engage with the more personal and biographical expressions of the physical and

psychical stages of the female and her body. Tensions could have arisen between the weightiness of the subject matter of the Holocaust and the lack of apparent significance of it to Soltau's work, other than through her biographical strategies of exploring the effects of disappearance and loss of many of Germany's soldiers during the Second World War.⁷⁷ To this end I decided to locate and historicize Soltau's work in relation to that of some of her contemporaries in order to more fully explore the importance of the haptic to her work.

Chapter Four investigates a more associative reading of hair in relation to Kathy Prendergast's work. I argue here that she frames hair as both sculptural material, and through metaphorical suggestion in her map drawings. Correspondences are drawn between her work and that of another Irish artist, Dorothy Cross (b.1956-), who also references hair, but animal rather than human. Material properties of hair in its movement from growth to loss are particularly relevant as I investigate possible symbolic parallels between hair and migration from Ireland to England. Notions of 'woman' as a metonym for Ireland, and the spaces of women, including the home or landscape, which are sometimes considered as spaces of loss or utopias, are also explored in this chapter, and I suggest that Prendergast's intriguing use of the surface in her work evokes a poetic lyricism around her framing of hair. This chapter draws on some of the histories of representations and perceptions of Ireland, including Marian imagery, and postcolonial issues of migration. Again, due to the prescribed limits of this study and my primary focus on hair, I have only been able to touch on some of the immense histories of these topics in order to situate my arguments.

⁷⁷ These particular works do not form part of this study, but can be found in *Annegret Soltau*, ed. by Kathrin Schmidt, (Darmstadt: Mathildenhöhe, 2006).

The fifth chapter pays greater attention to histories than the previous chapters and begins by briefly examining the histories of black hair partly because as I demonstrate in the second section some of the historical representations and documents associated with blackness, specifically in the form of 'race' magazines that Ellen Gallagher draws on in her work, are central to her explorations of identity, of "making something new out of detritus."⁷⁸ The magazine images of hair and beauty products she uses historically were aimed at black audiences during the mid-twentieth century. I argue that as Gallagher's work enables us to rethink oppositional notions of black/white or good/bad hair and hairstyling and, in the final section of the chapter, of Irish blackness, interstices in these dualisms can facilitate new understandings of identity, as well as rethinking language and structures of communication. I then continue to explore her abstracted forms and representations of hair as they engage with diasporic slave imagery, fragmenting and evoking identity as a site of dispersal and transformation rather than stasis and preconception. It is in some of these works, particularly, that the two meanings of repetition Deleuze proposes early in *Difference and Repetition* can be seen to enable interpretation, one static (in the art work), the other dynamic (internal to the idea). My decision to place Gallagher's work as an endpoint to the thesis enables a certain open-endedness to the argument and the possibility for further divergences around the topic of hair.

Where possible I have either interviewed each of my chosen artists or had email communication with them, providing valuable primary resource material, albeit one that might carry problems of artistic intention. As I explain in Chapter One in relation to my interview with Chrystl Rijkeboer, the stated intentions of the artists are sometimes at variance with my own analyses, and occasionally can be seen to limit or

⁷⁸ Ellen Gallagher in conversation with Romi Crawford at Tate Liverpool on 8 April 2010 during the exhibition *Afro Modern: Journeys Through The Black Atlantic*, (29 January-25 April 2010).

steer meaning in particular directions. This is something I bear in mind throughout the thesis. My interview with Rijkeboer can be found in Appendix 1, that with Soltau in Appendix 2, and illustrations of all the works discussed in Appendix 3.

In this introductory chapter the parameters of the research project have been outlined; the artists, a timeframe, and the main aims of the study. The five artists I have chosen all have European connections, and were in the early stages of their careers during the late twentieth century. The tripartite purpose of the research has been outlined: to investigate why hair is such a productive and resonant site of meaning; how it is both suggestive of and responds to serial strategies; and why it appears to be of particular significance to women. In what follows, I will discuss the implications of hair as an embodied material, as well as its role as a haptic metaphor of the life cycle. I will also explore some of the complex and divergent histories of hair from being a rich marker of identity in cultural discourses of beauty, myth and femininity and as a symbol of status and power, to what might be seen as a darker side that reflects its liminality and abhorrence as a site of excess and body waste. As I argue, through its somatic connections, hair can be positioned both of, and yet abjected from, the living body.

Because hair supports so many diverse meanings, including being suggestive of life/death and mind/body, these are sometimes understood as dualistic and supportive of oppositional binaries. My proposal is rather for an approach based on theories of difference, in which my stated intention is to show how the work of my chosen artists can be seen to both challenge and subvert dualistic oppositions associated with patriarchal systems and structures, whilst also exploring alternative spaces in which multiple interpretations can find connective rather than oppositional meaning.

Chapter 1

Hairy Houses and Traumatic Echoes: Chrystl Rijkeboer's Serial Use of Hair

Introduction

"In the dark halls of a museum that is now what remains of Auschwitz, I see a heap of children's shoes, or something like that... The abjection of Nazi crime reaches its apex when death, which, in any case, kills me, interferes with what, in my living universe, is supposed to save me from death: childhood, science, among other things."¹

"At the beginning of the 19th century, Mary Shelley memorably and fearfully imagined that science would beget monsters. Two hundred years later, artists are taming those monsters and, in the process, turning them into works of art."²

Chrystl Rijkeboer's studio is a space of misshapen bodies, half-knit babies, flying angels with fearsome teeth, masks and avatars, dolls, toothed balls, houses hanging from picture frames, and hybrid monsters, and all are made from human hair. Entering this space for the first time one experiences a visceral reminder of the bestial nature of the body, and the horror of extreme hairiness. Far from being a glory on the head,³ this quantity and prevalence of hair evokes a sense of excess as well as a tension between the whole body and its parts.

Hair, as arguably the most visually expressive and individualistic part of our identity, is constantly being discarded as we have it trimmed or restyled. On each occasion this waste matter can be reused (often without our knowledge) in other activities, thus raising issues of vulnerability of the self to re-appropriation. When Rijkeboer collects hair waste and reworks it through domestic processes, effectively she amasses genetic material. Also, her strategies might be seen to challenge both traditional handicrafts,

¹ Kristeva, (1982), p. 4.

² Ronald Bailey, 'Pink Mice and Petrie Dishes: Artists Contemplate Biotechnology', *Reason*, 32, 7, (December 2000), 58-9.

³ The Bible suggests this, see I Corinthians, 11:15: "But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for [her] hair is given her for a covering."

and artistic pursuits and materials as she draws hair into aesthetic discourses.

Historically, activities such as spinning and knitting have been associated with craft and homemaking, rather than artistic practices. Perceived as the domain of women, these gendered processes were once necessary lines of work to clothe the family.

More recently they are often seen as ‘pastimes’; relaxation from rigours of work, and producing a personalised hand-made object.⁴ The numerous sculptural forms and the hair stored in Rijkeboer’s studio invoke other spaces and times where hair and even scalps, have been collected.

Born in Velsen in The Netherlands in 1959, Rijkeboer attended the Willem de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam between 1994-8 after working as a photographer’s assistant, a teacher, and finally as a social worker in a children’s care home. She has made clear that the ‘woman approach’ (an English phrase used by Rijkeboer) of artists Kiki Smith (b.1954 Germany), and Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010), has a continued influence on her strategies and methods: “For me, women’s art is emotional and wide, deep, multi-interpretable.”⁵ Rijkeboer uses the terms ‘emotional’ and ‘wide’ to explain her approach to her work, as well as how she sees art made by women compared with art made by men. She gave as an example her response to the exhibition *Double Sexus: Hans Bellmer and Louise Bourgeois* (2010-11) where, for her, the combination of Bellmer’s work and his reductive approach to women evoked

⁴ Although women are still more likely to pursue these activities, men are increasingly taking them up. Website www.ravelry.com, for instance, is dedicated to the uses of yarn, and has more than 1,000,000 members. Statistics are unavailable for the ratio of women to men. For a contemporary divergence of traditional handicrafts see also Maddy Costa, ‘Wool Britannia’ *The Guardian*, (10 October 2010), pp.18-19, or <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2010/oct/10/graffiti-knitting>> (26 October 2010) [accessed 19 June 2011]

⁵ Personal interview with Chrystl Rijkeboer at her studio in Haarlem, The Netherlands, 15 April 2009. Appendix 1. The interview was carried out in English, Rijkeboer’s second language, and I have not altered her use of it.

suggestions of a 'peepshow'.⁶ She saw Bourgeois' work as much more expressive and rich, with a greater potential for diversity of meanings.

The ways Rijkeboer engages with femininity throughout her work question gender divisions and roles. She says: "Yes, I challenge the role of women too. I want to say to women, 'think on your feet, keep your eyes open, find out who you are and be strong'."⁷ She cites the confrontational aspects and direct approach of Brit-artists Sarah Lucas (b.1962), Tracy Emin (b.1963) and Marc Quinn (b.1964) as important to her practices.⁸ Describing her work in terms of astonishment about human life, she suggests, "You can always view my work in two ways: kind, pleasant and innocent, or frightening, condemning and guilty."⁹ Rijkeboer has used the term 'innocent' on several occasions and in this instance she seems to allude to guilelessness, and an open-minded approach, something she acknowledges she also struggles to achieve sometimes.¹⁰ Although she seems to want her audience to see more than one possible interpretation of her work, she appears in this statement unconsciously to be limiting it to a dualism, rather than expanding it, to use her term, to be 'multi-interpretable'.

Whilst informed by Rijkeboer's intentions and interpretations of her work, my reflections probe these dualisms for further layers of meaning, and even possible elucidation of how art can be used as an interactive means of negotiating the world.¹¹ Rijkeboer's notion of oppositions *can* be read in certain pieces, and her intentional

⁶ The exhibition *Double Sexus: Hans Bellmer and Louise Bourgeois* (11 September 2010-16 January 2011) was held at the Gemeentemuseum, Den Haag.

⁷ Appendix 1.

⁸ Rijkeboer in interview with Claudio Parentela, (8 September 2006).

<<http://theextrafinger.blogspot.com/2006/09/interview-with-chrystl-rijkeboer.html>> Accessed 15 March 2008.

⁹ Chrystl Rijkeboer, <<http://www.rijkeboer.com/index.php/about>> [accessed 19 June 2011]

¹⁰ Appendix 1.

¹¹ Marsha Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 6.

sense of the works are sometimes at variance with my analysis as I attempt to engage with other complexities. Philosopher and writer Umberto Eco throws some light on potential responses to works of art, which is useful to my whole thesis, when he says:

“...we see it as the end product of an author’s effort to arrange a sequence of communicative effects in such a way that each individual addressee can refashion the original composition devised by the author. The addressee is bound to enter into an interplay of stimulus and response which depends on his unique capacity for sensitive reception of the piece...In fact, the form of the work of art gains its aesthetic validity precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which it can be viewed and understood.”¹²

It is not my plan to prefer one interpretation to another, but to explore and investigate the diverse possibilities in the artworks I examine; something that Rijkeboer calls ‘multi-interpretable’. My arguments are also inspired to some extent by what Marsha Meskimmon articulates as cosmopolitan imagination. She says:

“Understanding ourselves as wholly embedded within the world, we can imagine people and things beyond our immediate experience and develop our ability to respond to very different spaces, meanings and others...I would suggest there are no full accounts, and that seeking to find one is counterproductive.”¹³

The notion of responding to difference is important to Rijkeboer, and fundamental to my approach in this thesis.¹⁴ By drawing on this I will endeavor to show that artistic strategies can work in symbiotic ways to develop and extend both the artists’ and the spectators’ responses to and understanding of the world.

This chapter will analyze some of the ways that Rijkeboer can be seen to examine perceptions of identity within home and society, and what this might mean in terms of the spaces and positioning of the individual within various relationships. I will

¹² Umberto Eco, ‘The Poetics of the Open Work //1962’, in *Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop, (London and Cambridge Mass.: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2006), pp. 20-40 (p. 22).

¹³ Meskimmon, (2011), pp. 8-9.

¹⁴ Appendix 1.

argue that a dualistic understanding of notions such as innocence and guilt increasingly are depicted by Rijkeboer as potentially unstable and shifting locations. Although her artistic practices are driven by her use of hair, its materiality is also shown as a paradoxical marker of identity. In this way, hair can be seen as more than an object or symbol of events providing a descriptive representation (in this case an artwork, or its critique), it can also be seen as instrumental in our embodied experiences or perceptions.¹⁵

To date the limited amount of writing on Rijkeboer's work is mainly brief passages in exhibition catalogues, her own statements, and interviews. Our initial meeting and interview at her studio in April 2009 and subsequent discussions by email have been invaluable for this investigation, which is the first substantial analysis of her work. Using mainly sculptural forms, Rijkeboer's work often tends towards installation.¹⁶ The three-dimensionality of her pieces and their extremely tactile nature, due in part to our human inclination to touch and stroke our hair and skin, facilitates interaction with the works. In some pieces, for example *Het Oordeel (The Verdict)* (1998) [Figure 1.1], it is necessary to sit in the chair in order to hear the audio aspect of the work.¹⁷ Rijkeboer has also made two videotapes and both are part of installations that combine a digital element with sculptural forms.¹⁸ Her techniques with hair of spinning, felting, and knitting have all been learned for the purpose of generating new aesthetic meanings with this visceral material.¹⁹ Following a tradition of women

¹⁵ I loosely draw on philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1908-61) investigation of a subject-object dialogue as the foundation of human experience originally published in French in 1945. See *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, (London: Routledge, 1962).

¹⁶ For instance *Stolen Identities* (2005), *Avatar* (2006), and *Family Ties* (2007).

¹⁷ *Eat Me, Burn Me* (1996) made when Rijkeboer was a student is possibly her earliest work to engage directly with the viewer. She attached six edible and six flammable sculptures on metal plates to a bridge in Museumpark, Rotterdam, which passers-by could interact with in any way they chose.

¹⁸ These works are *Stolen Identities* (2005), and *Sisters* (2007).

¹⁹ *Hautnah: Das Haar in Kunst und Kultur*, ed. by Stefanie Dathe, (Burgreiden-Rot: Biberacher Verlagsdruckerie, 2009), p.24.

who throughout history have produced household fabrics and garments, often of cotton, linen or wool, Rijkeboer's practical relationship with the processes she uses is sometimes contradictory:

"I'm not interested in the process of how it's done; it's only a means to an end. Spinning can be relaxing but irritating because it takes a long time to spin even a small ball of hair. I find I can think very well while I'm spinning, and I use the time for thinking about new works and texts... the craft is just a process to develop the artwork."²⁰

Her subject matter is often rooted in gender – vaginal imagery, pregnancy, cherubs and dolls – and although her over-arching concerns, specifically universal dualities, are not so gender specific, tensions and conflicts between male and female are often evoked. Numerous other gendered issues around the beauty industry, food, privacy and security also permeate her work, often in tandem with other themes. Keeping in mind Rijkeboer's serial use of hair during the last twelve years, this chapter will examine her exploration of the complexities of identity through her social critique of personal and political relationships. Several key themes run through her work, and the chapter will begin by investigating her engagement with echoes of historical trauma, notably that of the Holocaust. This section considers a number of artworks from the *Onschuld* series (1998), *Lost Memories* and *Memories*, (2000). This will be followed by five further sections, the first of which examines home and the familial in *Installatie Onschuld* (1998) and *Home Sweet Home* (2008), the next, gender issues raised around women's practice and feminist concerns, including those of ageing and the 'Barbie syndrome'²¹ through *Burka* (2006), and *She Only Wanted a Boy* (2008). *R's Escape* (2008) and associated works around the fairytale Rapunzel will be the focus of the section on fairytales as motif and metaphor, and the significance of seriality to repetition and cloning will be explored mainly through *Baalbushka* and

²⁰ Appendix 1.

²¹ This takes its name from the Barbie doll.

Babooska (2003). The final section relating to notions of portraiture will be explored in *Perfect Strangers* (2004), *Stolen Identities* series (2005), and *Avatar* series (2006).

Hair and Historical Trauma

In the winter of 1986 Rijkeboer visited Poland and stumbled upon a museum and remains of a concentration camp at Majdanek. She says that this encounter had, and I will argue that it continues to have, a significant impact on her artistic practice.²² In her use of steel and concrete in *The Human System* (1997) [Figure 1.2], made during her training, the human body is reduced to a skeletal armature analogous with surviving concentration camp detainees. By the following year Rijkeboer had begun to work with human hair, and has continued to do so almost exclusively since then.

Her reasons for going to Poland were not to do with her own cultural or ethnic roots; she has no Jewish ancestry. She went to take photographs of the country as a visitor on holiday, travelling by car to wherever the road led. She says:

“ We passed a small town and saw this camp, which made us curious. It was all deserted and you could just go in. This camp was called Majdanek and it was so horrible, this camp shocked me so much...before you knew you walked into a gas chamber, looking like shower spaces. And those two small ovens where they incinerated so many people.”²³

Some of the words used – shower, ovens – have associations with the domestic and home, but in this context evoke other much more sinister meanings. At Majdanek, as in other concentration camps, women’s hair in particular was often shorn and stored

²² Appendix 1.

²³ Appendix 1. Although this visit to Majdanek remains of significance to Rijkeboer’s work, I can only mention aspects of the Holocaust that are relevant to this study, and those briefly. Such were the effects on Rijkeboer of stumbling on the Majdanek camp, that she later returned to Poland to visit Auschwitz/Birkenau. Because she was more prepared for this planned visit, she felt better able to manage her reactions and feelings afterwards.

or sent away for processing into blankets. As Johanna M Jacobsen explains:

“...this hair-shearing process remains in memory perhaps the single most terrifying and humiliating event that happened in the camps...shearing took away an external characteristic used not only to establish femininity, but as a method to reaffirm one’s sexuality.”²⁴

When Rijkeboer saw hair blankets at the camp, she was amazed that anyone would make such things.²⁵ Usually associated with the domestic, the reasons and conditions of their production, and the horrors imbued in them in this context, lead us to see them as more shocking than comforting. Although only a lesser aspect in the much larger topic of the Holocaust, these objects symbolising comfort can also be considered as metaphors of gendered brutality; the denuding of women’s bodies led to the covering of men’s (German soldiers) albeit with a product that must have been uncomfortable and itchy. How different to the traditional fine homespun garments historically made for bedclothes or trousseaus, which were often handed down from one generation to another. These hair blankets not only challenge such traditions, but suggest de-humanization of the individuals whose heads were shaved, and whose very existence usually led to systematic persecution and even extermination.²⁶

Rijkeboer’s art contributes to the large body of academic, literary, visual and oral work, now known broadly as Holocaust studies.²⁷ She acknowledges the impact of

²⁴ Johanna Micaela Jacobsen, ‘Women’s Sexuality in WWII Concentrations Camps: Tool for Survival... Tool for Oppression’, <http://www.vho.org/aaargh/fran/actu/actu00/doc2000/womensex.html> [accessed 4 May 2010]

²⁵ Appendix 1.

²⁶ Although estimates vary, many tons of women’s hair were found in various concentration camps after the end of WWII (possibly as much as 7 tons at Auschwitz alone), in addition to that already sent to processing plants and factories to be made into blankets and socks. See various websites including <http://www.holocaust-history.org/>, or the extensive literature on this topic.

²⁷ Under the umbrella term Holocaust Studies, areas of particular interest to this chapter are tourism, and secondary witnessing. Both have an enormous scope for research, but are beyond the remit of this thesis. Tourism was explored as part of a symposium “Journeys through the Holocaust” on 11 December 2006 at Southampton University. The phrase ‘holocaust tourism’ was coined by art and cultural historian Griselda Pollock in ‘Holocaust Tourism: Being There, Looking Back and the Ethics of Spatial Memory’ in *Visual Culture and Tourism*, ed. by David Crouch, and Nina Lübbren, (Oxford: Berg, 2003), pp. 175-90.

her visit to both her choice of material and work.

“I never will forget. You could feel bad vibes at those camps. Those days I worked as a social worker in a foster home for abused children. All thoughts came together, why do people treat each other always so bad? I think those thoughts never really left.”²⁸

“I always think life is too beautiful and sometimes too short to ruin it. Hair stands for the most emotional material I can choose to express these feelings.”²⁹

Themes around persecution, brutality and disrespect of human life can be seen to inform her work less obviously from about 2000, but that is not to suggest her early works were simply a therapeutic working through of the distress and horror she experienced. Rather, it might seem that over a period of time her responses to the active ‘agency’ of her work enabled the development of her subject matter and other themes.³⁰

Among Rijkeboer’s contemporaries who also make works using hair that reference violence and conflict is the Columbian artist Doris Salcedo (b. 1958).³¹ Salcedo also uses hair, for instance in her *Unland* series (1995-8), to construct what Tanya Barson describes as, “material testimony of those experiences and their enduring impact on the lives of those involved” (from the violent regions of northern Columbia).³² Both Salcedo and Rijkeboer can be seen to explore in various ways how we reconcile personal memories and historical echoes of perpetrations of violence and brutality. However, Salcedo’s work can be seen as responses to contemporary occurrences in her homeland, whereas Rijkeboer’s work responds to the historic remains or echoes

²⁸ Appendix 1.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Following Merleau-Ponty, see note 13. Meskimmon, (2011), p. 6 also refers to art’s agency.

³¹ Although his medium has never been hair, Willie Doherty’s work (b.1959 in Northern Ireland), also evokes memories and undercurrents of fear, surveillance and violence stemming partly from witnessing the Bogside massacre (Bloody Sunday) as a 13 year old from his home in Derry.

³² Tanya Barson, ‘Unland: The Place of Testimony’, *Tate Papers*, (Spring 2004), <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/04spring/unland_paper.htm> [accessed 12 October 2010]

of horror and its physical traces. I would argue that rather than evoking political landscapes which Salcedo's work references, Rijkeboer's work enables a sense of the unknown victim/perpetrator, which mostly is located within the personal landscapes of family and home. Indeed, suggestions can be found in Rijkeboer's work that even though the identities of those concerned may be anonymous, we may nevertheless all be implicated through passive or active, un/conscious "processes of othering."³³

To throw some light on this issue it may be useful to consider in more depth why Rijkeboer uses hair. Her explanation of it as the most emotionally suitable material for her work is understandable, but hair as a site of, and metaphor for, abjection might also be briefly examined to elucidate my point. Since I intend to draw on notions of abjection throughout the thesis it is important to clarify my reading of it. In *Powers of Horror* (1982), Julia Kristeva explores the body as a site of abjection, of margins that work against norms and disturb order. Together with other corporeal waste such as dung, body fluids, and nail parings, hair falls into this grouping and, like the subject or body from which it emanates, it becomes 'other' at the expense of its own death. As Kristeva says:

"Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit...It is no longer I who expel, 'I' is expelled...It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something from which one does not part."³⁴

Thus, in a Kristevan reading, hair might be seen amongst other things as a metaphor of detritus and death. Etymologically, the term abject can sustain several interrelated meanings, including the wretched and the contemptible, as well as actively referring

³³ Hedwig Fraunhofer uses this phrase in her article 'Gender and the Abject in Sartre', *Gender Forum: An Internet Journal for Gender Studies*, 18, (2007) 1-12 (p. 1).
<http://www.genderforum.org/issues/gender-disgussed/gender-and-the-abject-in-sartre/>
 [accessed 13 October 2010]

³⁴ Kristeva, (1982), pp. 3-4.

to degradation and expulsion associated with both body and mind. Thus, notions of detritus and its expulsion can be argued not only in terms of the body, but specifically in relation to the female body. Kristeva has written at length on the female body as central to abjection. As the place of childbirth, physical margins of the female body work with literal procedures of expulsion and exclusion, while simultaneously raising the inevitability of death in life. Parturition in pregnancy occurs as a matter of course; in effect the female body expels what it recognizes as other.

In her complex philosophical reasoning Kristeva explores connections between the feminine body and what she terms the 'drive foundations' of fascism,³⁵ and here it is of particular relevance to Rijkeboer's references to the Holocaust; specifically through her engagements with femininity and hair. At a physical level, when the boundaries of the female body are endangered, such as during pregnancy, they work to guard against further loss by birthing the child. In more abstract terms, if this concept is examined against other symbolic systems, including those of nation, then boundaries can only be preserved through what Fraunhofer has called 'processes of othering', that is, as social markers of 'us' and 'them', which secure one's own identity at the expense of another, for instance in terms of gender, race, or politics. Thus hair and the feminine can be seen as metaphors of abjection. According to Kristeva, abjection in the abstract body concerns itself with: "what does not respect borders, positions, rules... The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior."³⁶ So, abjection offers a way to theorize 'othering', for instance, in aspirations of racial and cultural purity, where perceived notions of racial detritus and waste, such as occurred during the

³⁵ Kristeva, (1982), p. 155.

³⁶ Kristeva, (1982), p. 4.

Holocaust, are eradicated to guard against contamination. Underlying this argument of abjection is the notion that the 'other' is a fundamental part of each of us, and more complex than simply abject material or the female body. In this context 'other' might be seen as a mobile, unstable and changing concept, and this is particularly relevant if we are to understand Rijkeboer's statements about innocence/knowing. She is, however, mindful of complications:

"We are born 'not-knowing', then we become more 'knowing'. It's not really guilt, but it is knowing or understanding guilt, being aware. 'Hair' as a material for my sculptures, began to represent the duality of our nature, however, I discovered these dualities are not in contradiction but are in fact equal: love and hate, guilt and innocence, strength and weakness."³⁷

I am also mindful in this chapter that care must be taken not to reduce interpretations of Rijkeboer's work as determined by a single topic, albeit possibly one of the most powerful of the twentieth century; the Holocaust. It has been suggested by art historian and cultural theorist Ernst van Alpen, that our access to a particular past is effected by the images presented by the artist in what he describes as a 'framework of reenactment',³⁸ where we as spectators are subjectively involved in the experience. Media transmission of knowledge about atrocities to humanity may lead, not to healing of the primary trauma, but to secondary traumas that are in themselves traumatizing.³⁹ Given the account of the influence that Rijkeboer claims the Majdanek camp has had on her, these are arguments that might lead us to ask if her serial use of hair can be seen in some of her pieces to evoke acts of both vulnerability and brutality? Although Rijkeboer's work cannot be seen as a politics of testimony since she did not live through the horrors of the actual events, she enables her

³⁷ Marie Gibbons, 'Marie Gibbons in conversation with Chrystl Rijkeboer', *Womens Work Magazine*, (12 September 2009) <<http://womensworkmagazine.com/>> [accessed 23 October 2009] [no longer available]

³⁸ Ernst van Alpen, *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature and Theory*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 11. Van Alpen describes this framework as one that is not a representation of a particular past, for instance a photograph, but a performance of it.

³⁹ Van Alpen, (1997), p. 165. This bears in mind crucial differences between actual primary trauma experiences compared to viewing/hearing documentary dramas of the events.

audience to engage in her experiences of it as an historical memorial.⁴⁰ Therefore, if her work is suggestive of a *memento mori* to the potential of inhumanity, might this be one reason for her sustained use of hair? In this way the viewer is offered a visual mnemonic, that is a continual associative reminder, of the embodied being's capacity to commit horrific acts.

Rijkeboer came to the idea of using hair through the combination of her Polish visit and her psychological investigation of fairytales.⁴¹ Although fairytales may imply fantasy and escapism, Marina Warner suggests they can offer "alternative ways of sifting right and wrong."⁴² With their connotations to old wives' tales, an ambiguous phrase that supports notions of ancient wisdom from old women as well as nonsense and deceptive acts promulgated by idle talk, the fairytale can be seen as a site of contradiction based on contested notions of the feminine. *Het Oordeel* (1998) [Figure 1.1], which exploits the theme of fairytales to explore issues of categorization, invites the viewer to be ensconced in an armchair that is reminiscent of a long-haired beast. In doing so the sitter hears the words 'women to the right, men to the left' in eighteen different languages. The title of the work (*The Verdict*) also implies decisions made to which we as the audience are not privy, but affect us. As a participant in this work we trigger pronouncement of the verdict, and implicate ourselves in a shared responsibility of social and gendered partisanship. *Het Oordeel* evokes the many discriminatory social practices we encounter from our earliest experiences of school playgrounds or public toilets, and, more disturbing, it recalls the segregation of men and women in concentration camps. Our escape from the automated and anonymous message happens as we vacate the chair. Just as

⁴⁰ Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 3.

⁴¹ Rijkeboer and her fellow students organized an exhibition about fairytales in 1998.

⁴² Warner, (1995), p. 19.

Goldilocks does in the fairytale, we too, as spectators, can leave the chair when it becomes too uncomfortable, although by then we are already witnesses in the histories of discrimination.

Rijkeboer originally intended to sew each hair into the chair individually, but realizing this process would be too time-consuming, she covered it by sewing together second-hand wigs from a wigmaker.⁴³ In this context, the wig becomes a complex symbol not only of hairy beasts in folklore, and of regimes of head shaving, but also of Jewish traditions. Married women are encouraged to cover their hair, sometimes with a scarf or a hat, but often with a wig. Whilst appearing so real as to be mistaken for their own hair, a wig functions as a barrier to the eyes of men, whilst creating a private space of femininity, over which the woman has control.⁴⁴ Wigs used in *Het Oordeel* may or may not have been discarded by Jewish women, but they enable further inferences to be drawn to both historic and contemporary gendering in Jewish culture, as well as emphasising the countless victims of the Holocaust.

Rijkeboer's next work with hair, *Onschuld I (Innocence I)* (1998) [Figure 1.3], is pivotal to her central theme of innocence and its loss. Here, a photograph of a pregnant belly protrudes through a blanket of felted hair, symbolically reducing woman to no more than her reproductive function. Rijkeboer's repeated use of a blanket in her early works suggests a background canvas or narrative to the object, and frames those pieces in a particular way. Because we are aware of the influence of Holocaust imagery on Rijkeboer, *Onschuld* could be seen to evoke childbirth as a site of fear for the safety of the innocent baby, and acts as a metaphor for the loss of

⁴³ Gibbons, (12 September 2009).

⁴⁴ This tradition is referenced in The Bible, Numbers 5:18. See also Lynne Schreiber, *Hide and Seek: Jewish Women and Hair Covering*, (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2005).

innocence itself. The following description from a documentation of the horrors of Auschwitz frames this gendered question of innocence and guilt:

“The fate of pregnant women and children was the most heart-rending of all. They were sent straight to gas chambers in the early period of the camp’s existence. But there were also cases of childbirth starting right in the centre of a barrack. The mothers mostly died of infection after being delivered of the child. If the child survived it would be taken by the Aryan doctors and killed.”⁴⁵

The only evidence of a child in *Onschuld I* is the tumid belly; once delivered, both may disappear. This conjures notions of innocence/harm or loss of innocence, in the same way that ‘not guilty’ relies on ‘guilty’ being proved innocent, the one nonexistent without the other. The second work in this series *Onschuld II* (*Innocence II*) (1998) [Figure 1.4], is a wall blanket of hair onto which Rijkeboer has stitched a series of numbers that register her within society. The blanket is composed of small areas of felted hair, some lighter than others depending on the hair colour, and onto which a number is stitched, then the whole glued together. Personal numbers are usually closely guarded secrets in our increasingly visible digital world, but when numbers replace names, their significance changes. Evoking the practice of tattooing new arrivals at concentration camps, this work is deeply imbued with references to the Holocaust. Once a prisoner was numbered it was their sole means of identification. Smolen explains the procedure:

“The registration of the new arrivals would then begin. Personal data of the prisoners were taken down and they were given the identification numbers. The camp number was tattooed on the left forearm in Auschwitz camp only...From this moment on, the prisoner was nameless.”⁴⁶

The fifty numbers on the blanket document one life (Rijkeboer’s) but the work might also be seen as a metonym for the Holocaust. A comparable work, *Strijd* (*Struggle*) [Figure 1.5] also 1998, depicts seven heads emerging from a carpet of hair formed

⁴⁵ Kazimierz Smolen, *Auschwitz 1940-1945*, (Albuquerque: Route 66 Publishing, 1995), pp. 62-3.

⁴⁶ Smolen, (1995), pp. 42-3.

from loose curls. Rijkeboer explains her intention; “Some of the heads are further out of the ground than others, and they’re the ones who are the most powerful.”⁴⁷ In *Strijd*, Rijkeboer can be seen to use hair to engage indirectly with political dialogues of power as she frames hair as an embodied experience, through which we struggle in a symbolic sea of life. *Strijd* suggests a literal hierarchy of power, where those who are stronger or more resolute either physically or intellectually might rise above the weak and timid. The heads, like the belly in *Onschuld I*, are hairless, effectively rendering them both genderless and anonymous, and as such they might also be seen as partly buried corpses. Although mass graves have been used in atrocities throughout history in many countries, including Croatia, Russia, Rwanda and Spain, the magnitude of those during the Holocaust, for instance, remain deeply disturbing and emotional topics.

The themes and images of these earliest works suggest a preoccupation with the images Rijkeboer saw in Majdanek camp. Although the Holocaust is not directly referenced, a ‘reenactment’ can be seen to occur of certain relevant features, namely through her use of hair. *Lost Memories* (2000) [Figure 1.6], also draws on the significance of cut hair, and again allusions can be drawn to concentration camps. However, in this piece the human figure, although absent, remains a palpable presence in the lock of hair over the back of the chair and the scissors left carelessly on the seat. This work might suggest a hastily abandoned domestic tableau, narrating absence through the memorialised reminder. In doing so a convergence between history and the present is simultaneously evoked even as it is disrupted, and points to parallels with works such as *Unland* (1995-8) and *Atrabiliarios* (1991-6) by Doris Salcedo. Salcedo’s use of hair in *Unland* evokes both fragility and absence, whilst in

⁴⁷ Appendix 1.

Atrabiliarios her use of shoes suggests her engagement with the ghostly remains of the individual.⁴⁸ Salcedo's research trips in Columbia furnished her with stories from survivors of the Civil War. Her aesthetic responses to these testimonies have, according to Bennett:

"Inspired a series of works since the early 1990s that engage with the trappings of domestic space, reworking familiar objects in ways that evoke the losses that households have borne and the silences that descend in the spaces inhabited by the bereaved."⁴⁹

Both Rijkeboer and Salcedo can be seen to uncover how materials, and how hair in particular, might convey specific associative meanings as their work questions aspects of the "violence endemic to human nature."⁵⁰

Rijkeboer introduces a more natural and unprocessed presentation of hair in *Lost Memories* and *Memories* (2000) [Figure 1.7]. In *Memories* a glazed, lead-covered table is filled with what appears to be freshly cut curls, and a whispering voice tells childhood stories. The characteristic malleability of lead is echoed in the visual looseness of the hair, and this might be seen as a foil for some of its uses: coffins, radiation shields and bullets. Widely thought of as a stealth disease, lead exposure can have damaging effects as it accumulates in the bones and organs of the body and may cause permanent neurological damage. As a possible metaphor for our treatment of memories, and the ways in which they can become insidious in the lived experience, the combination of lead and hair raise such issues of memory, and

⁴⁸ Doris Salcedo's *Unland* takes the form of three tables: *Unland: the orphan's tunic* (1997), *Unland: irreversible witness* (1995-98) and *Unland: audible in the mouth* (1998). Salcedo uses hair-like threads for stitching shoes in *Atrabiliarios*, see Doris Salcedo, ed. by Nancy Princenthal, and others, (London: Phaidon, 2000). I also examine hair and stitching in Annegret Soltau's work in Chapter Three.

⁴⁹ Bennett, (2005), p. 60.

⁵⁰ Doris Salcedo, 'Caslos Basualdo in Conversation with Doris Salcedo', in Princenthal, (2000), pp. 10,141. Reputedly, Salcedo's discovery was inspired by seeing the work of the German artist Joseph Beuys (1921-86) when she went to New York after her art training in Columbia.

suggest that violations of the body can occur within the spaces of the domestic and the industrial as well as in the spaces of war. As Rijkeboer suggests, these may take on the guise of childhood or fairy stories in order to conceal a harsher reality, and challenge notions of innocence.

Hairy Houses and Familial Frames

Home and the familial become central issues from around 2008 for Rijkeboer and which she again explores through her strategies with hair. A large body of theory exists around the concept of home, and many artists, art historians, cultural geographers and anthropologists (among others) have worked or currently work with this topic.⁵¹ Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* first published in 1958 is a particularly useful text, which posits a symbiotic relationship between our perceptions of home, particularly those of our childhood, and ourselves.⁵² Drawing on his suggestion that we consider parts of the home as familiar psychic spaces, we can make a series of poetic connections to memories of these. He claims that in doing so: "we add to our store of dreams... We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection."⁵³ However, I suggest that these dreams may not always be delightful or captivating; they might also be unpleasant and loathsome. These ideas of memories of home being shifting and contradictory is of some relevance to aspects of Rijkeboer's work, even taking into account that while Bachelard

⁵¹ Including artists Rachel Whiteread (b.1963) and Louise Bourgeois, and art historian Gill Perry.

⁵² Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994). First published as *La Poétique de l'Espace*, Presses Universitaires de France, (1958). Jane Humphries looks specifically at this issue in Maher and Prendergast's work, see Jane Humphries, 'The Emergence of a Domestic Avant-Garde in Contemporary Irish Art: The Paradoxical House/Home', <<http://www.tara.tcd.ie/jspui/bitstream/2262/39171/1/From%20Subversion%20to%20Celebration%20The%20Emergence%20of%20a%20domestic%20avant%20garde%20in%20contemporary%20Irish%20Art.pdf>> [accessed 27 October 2010] See also *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture*, ed. by Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft, (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006).

⁵³ Bachelard, (1994), p. 6.

specifically explored the spaces in the home in this theorization, Rijkeboer often explores the relationships between the inhabitants as well as the spaces of home.

Installatie Onschuld (Installation Innocence) (1998) [Figure 1.8], is part of the early *Onschuld* series of works that raises the issue of familial innocence/guilt within a notion of the home (and which I suggest can be read as a forerunner for several other works, and specifically *Home Sweet Home* (2008)).⁵⁴ Life-size figures in felted hair of a man and a woman, each holding a baby, stand within an open white pyramidal tent in *Installatie Onschuld*. Evoking our primitive ancestors through simian characteristics and nomadic intimations, the only facial feature of the figures is a gaping cavity with widely spaced teeth. Although the woman and child strike a Madonna pose, and indeed Rijkeboer names the female Maria, they appear to be screaming. The father figure meanwhile precariously holds his baby aloft over an enormous rigid penis. Obfuscating notions of family and ‘good’ parenting, the installation provokes reflection on our perceptions of innocence and guilt, as Rijkeboer challenges the historically sacred subject of family. The white sheeting of the open tent presents home as an airy imaginative space, terrestrial yet unwilling to be enclosed; one to which the spectator has access.

Where limits proffer boundaries, they establish norms and thresholds; they locate us. Differentiations here between the external and internal boundaries of the tented area are fluid and open, as walls and roof merge together with the gallery space. One of Bachelard’s ontological examples of the relationship between outside and inside draws from being and nothingness. Where the two are interchangeable, he argues fear can be perceived as not coming inside from outside, but rather fear comes from

⁵⁴ Rijkeboer’s other works with homes include *R’s Escape*, *Leaving the Nest*, *Family Tree* (all 2008), *Wish I Could Fly* (2009), *Home* (2010).

being itself. He asks: "Where can one flee, where find refuge? In what shelter can one take refuge? Space is nothing but a 'horrible outside-inside'."⁵⁵ Rijkeboer's *Installatie Onschuld* might be seen as representing the family and home in such a familial space where both physical and moral integrity are ambiguous.

Home Sweet Home [Figure 1.9] is a wall installation of seventy-two different homes. Each miniature knitted house or nest box hangs from a projecting crocheted branch attached to a knitted background of hair, which is enclosed in a frame. Rijkeboer has combined decorative, classical and simple frames in this project, some large enough to suggest wealth, others as small as mourning locket, popular in the nineteenth century.⁵⁶ By contrast the hair houses are of a generally uniform size and shape with only variation between the colours of hair used. Each house has a small aperture in the front that Rijkeboer has oversewn in a similar hair colour to the roof, while the hair of the house and the roof are usually dissimilar.⁵⁷ Rijkeboer says of the work: "The roof is the father and the house is the mother,"⁵⁸ as she moves the notion of family away from representations of the human figure onto hair as a metonym of embodiment. This allows her to collapse the body and home into one form, using a concept similar to that seen in Louise Bourgeois' series of works *Femmes Maison* (begun in the 1940s and continued for several decades). Bourgeois explored the themes of sexuality and femininity, and many of her works are around the themes of mother, father and the home. In the ways she fused the female body with the house, Bourgeois repeatedly raised issues of entrapment and breaking free, and these are also issues that Rijkeboer can be seen to explore.

⁵⁵ Bachelard, (1994), p. 218.

⁵⁶ Jolly, (2004).

⁵⁷ Rijkeboer has suggested in *Family Tree* (2007-8) that different coloured hair can be interpreted as mixing genes in a family history. I explore genetics and hair later in the chapter.

http://www.rijkeboer.com/index.php/gallery/image_full/155/

⁵⁸ Appendix 1.

Rijkeboer's intention in *Home Sweet Home* is "to subvert cherished notions of family histories."⁵⁹ This multiple work compares and questions stereotypical roles of father and mother (here father literally provides a roof over the family, while mother supports and nurtures), as well as their symbiosis. Although this idea suggests stability and unity between male and female, these houses are dangling in mid-air and vulnerable to damage. By raising this issue, Rijkeboer makes us aware of questions of security and temporality; the open void could be read as symbolic of ruptures and breaches of the home or family, as well as a vaginal opening. Her symbolic differentiation between the parts of the house develops a notion of gendering, which I also discuss later in relation to fairytales. When Bachelard explained the idea of the house as a nest, the male and female birds played separate roles: the female bird refined the roughly formed materials brought to the nest by the male bird, until by delicate touches she smoothed the interior of the house. Even after this cooperation, the nest remains fragile, but once the young have flown Bachelard suggests that it is no longer the centre of a world, it is nothing but a 'thing'.⁶⁰ Rijkeboer's miniature houses might variously symbolize abandoned worlds where only the results of the mother and father's actions remain, as well as being metonymic of the (male and female) body.

Hair is commonly accepted as a significant factor in shared familial traits, just as eye colour or facial configuration. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it has become a decisive means of both maternal and paternal identification for forensic and biological identification. Historically, hair has also been used as a natural indicator of race, as has skin colour. Many natural history museums around the world

⁵⁹ Quotation by Rijkeboer from *Chrystl Rijkeboer: Home*, an unpublished statement sent to the author 19 July 2010.

⁶⁰ Bachelard, (1994), pp. 94-102, specifically p. 94.

hold collections of hair samples, which were used in anthropological, biological and ethnographical research.⁶¹ These specimens can, for instance, provide detailed knowledge of racial mixing, and stand as metaphors for the archiving of people through various systems. This concept of cataloguing and classifying is in itself evocative of racial investigations associated with colonial frameworks of the nineteenth century, and as mentioned earlier, of racial and ethnic discrimination. During the early twentieth century in the United States, anthropological fieldwork carried out among Ojibwe communities in Minnesota, for instance, included samples of hair (later archived at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford), and details of name, age, parentage, eye and skin colour. Sarah Cheang suggests that rather than being an academic project that study had political and economic ramifications.⁶² Samples of hair remain useful for research long after their host body is extinct if stored in optimum environmental conditions. Such a sample, “a ghostly reminder of the absent body”, might be seen as the human remains of the ancestors of current populations.⁶³ To a certain extent this could cloud our responses to the practices of collecting hair as samples, and possibly even for artworks, which given appropriate care, could last for generations and form a random archive of DNA as well as being part of art’s histories.

As a marker of the individual, a sample of hair can also be an indicator of family, and as such can place the individual in positions of tension. Rijkeboer’s installation *Sisters* (2007) [Figure 1.10], comprises a sculptural object and accompanying video. A knitted blanket of hair is moulded over the forms of what appear to be four figures

⁶¹ The Natural History Museum in London reportedly holds more than 5000 samples of human hair, Cheang, ‘Roots: Hair and Race’, in Biddle-Perry and Cheang, (2008), p. 27.

⁶² Cheang in Biddle-Perry and Cheang, (2008), p. 37

⁶³ Janice Miller, ‘Hair Without a Head: Disembodiment and the Uncanny’, in Biddle-Perry and Cheang, (2008), pp. 183-92 (p. 184).

who sit facing outwards in a cross shape. In the continuous video playing on the wall behind, a woman walks towards the camera through a shadowy passage then dematerializes into darkness, after which three other women appear one after the other, and also fade away. Both the 'family blanket' and video relate directly to Rijkeboer and her three sisters. She says: "This is a symbol of our upbringing, influences, and genetic origin."⁶⁴ The hairy shroud is variously suggestive of security and unity, as well as suffocation and secrecy. The dim passageway in the video is rich in metaphoric associations, evoking the symbolic and solitary nature of prenatal expulsion from the womb to life and its fading away into death, as well as leaving the familial home.

By broadening the explicit personal references out into a politics of disappearance, the continuously vanishing women in the video and the invisible women under the blanket, who we can associate with Rijkeboer and her sisters, evoke the ghosts of the many thousands who vanished throughout history, for instance, during the Holocaust or those in Columbia that Salcedo's work references with such poignancy. If Rijkeboer had solely used the hair of herself and her sisters, then the work might arguably have been even more personal, but she has used hair cuttings from local hairdressers in this work, as in all her others. In effect she has spun and knitted many heads of hair, all of them unknown (but nevertheless identifiable by their DNA). The familiarity of the four sisters is questioned through the use of anonymous hair, even as it is emphasised in the secret and intimate space of the blanket. Rijkeboer's feminist concerns are also visible in the postures of the generic women hunkering down back to back. The castellated yet anthropomorphic shape evokes a symbolic

⁶⁴ <http://www.rijkeboer.com/index.php/gallery/image_full/126/>

Link to video <<http://www.rijkeboer.com/Sisters/>> [accessed 19 June 2011] Rijkeboer adapted the humming section of 'Miss Celie's Blues' from the film *The Colour Purple*, Dir. Steven Spielberg. Warner. 1985, into a continuous loop for this video.

sisterhood facing outwards towards the spectator in a shared protection, while the endless loop of the video suggests ongoing histories of both religious and secular sisterhoods from Amazonian women to modern feminism.⁶⁵

Women's Practice and Feminist Concerns

As I argued in the Introduction to this thesis, hair can be seen as a metaphor for the body, and specifically for the female body. 'Blondes', 'redheads' and so on are commonly used metonymic descriptions to denote various stereotypical notions of women. Throughout her work Rijkeboer self-consciously references several feminist concerns including stereotyping, gender preferences, categorization and concealment. In *Burka* (2006) [Figure 1.11], her use of hair and direct reference to the female body raised the topic of women's concealment, and which *Sisters* continued the following year.⁶⁶ Within some feminist theory of the past few decades, 'woman' has been perceived as the subject of the male gaze, and various theoretical positions have developed this concept.⁶⁷ Although *Burka* and other related works including *Stolen Identity* (2005), the *Avatar* series (2006), or as discussed above, *Sisters*, could be explored through a reading of the male gaze, this is not something Rijkeboer suggests in her statements. She is more concerned in *Burka* with notions of

⁶⁵ There have been many religious and secular sisterhoods throughout history, including the Beguines, who are thought to have begun in The Netherlands in the thirteenth century, occupying a liminal position neither in society, nor excluded from it, that is to say a borderline position. Liminal might also refer to movement across a threshold.

⁶⁶ The burqa is usually worn outside the home by Muslim women (a *nigab* or full-face veil in combination with a burqa covers a woman completely except for her eyes, which also may be covered with a fine veil), and creates a personal space in which she is visually concealed.

⁶⁷ Jacques Lacan (1901-81) introduced the concept of the gaze in connection to a child looking in a mirror at him/herself. See Jacques Lacan, 'The Eye and the Gaze' in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Alan Sheridan, (New York: Norton, 1978). Laura Mulvey examined a notion of the cinematic gaze and the male who imposes his (unwanted) gaze on woman, and so objectifies her. See Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16, 3, (1975), 6-18. Artist, psychoanalyst and feminist theorist Bracha Ettinger denies the polarities of a male gaze, (male subject versus female object) in her complex development of a matrixial gaze. See Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

oppression, and the strengths that might come from contesting this, as well as fear of the unknown. She says: "The work takes a stand against the religious directive to cover the female body, a directive that ostensibly aims to prevent seduction but only serves to take away the woman's identity and respect."⁶⁸

For women in the Muslim world, garments and clothing can resonate with spiritual concerns as well as gender issues, and this complex fusion of the two may be less familiar to westernized views. Western notions of prescriptive clothing for women primarily raise questions of gender and freedom, and the burqa, for instance, is often perceived as a device of male control. Embodying a rich yet contentious symbol of freedom and oppression of the self, the burqa draws attention to issues arising from either security or fear in a specifically gendered framework.⁶⁹ Rijkeboer describes the burqa as "a protest against all exploitative proscriptions that serve only to maintain the power of authorities."⁷⁰ However, the burqa is a site of some cultural complexity, variously described and discussed as a place of retreat against a society that has 'disappointed' women, as an immoral site of 'sex under the veil', as a place of interiority, and even as a shroud that buries women alive.⁷¹ Although it may seem that the female is placed at the centre of every dialogue about veiling and the burqa, it is often masculine perceptions, reactions, and traditions that are instrumental in the instigation of, and reasons for, these interchanges. For the Muslim woman who wears a burqa it may place her in a better position to be taken seriously, and from

⁶⁸ Chrystl Rijkeboer, *I D: Hairworks by Chrystl Rijkeboer*, Harlem, (2008), (unpaginated).

⁶⁹ I refer here to reactions from the Western world, not from those countries where the burqa is an accepted part of cultural life. In 2010, a Member of the British Parliament reasoned he would not meet anyone wearing a burqa; since the constituent was able to see his face, he should be able to "satisfy himself of the identity of a person", Laura Roberts, *The Daily Telegraph*, (17 July 2010).

⁷⁰ Chrystl Rijkeboer, (2008), unpaginated.

⁷¹ Faegheh Shirazi, *The Veil Unveiled: The Hijab in Modern Culture*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), pp. 50, 159-62.

there gain access to education, employment opportunities, healthcare, and so on.⁷²

At almost two metres high *Burka* is an imposing sculptural form of human hair that was spun and knitted over a period of several months.⁷³ Rijkeboer says of the work:

"Ignorance of what we don't understand makes us afraid. Muslim women are oppressed in many parts of the world, and the burqa is a symbol of this but it is also one of strength for those who choose to wear it. It's about choices and how we can make them, about accepting, and the turning point as well, why we are so afraid of burqas."⁷⁴

The seventeen-kilogram weight of *Burka* and the closeness and bristly nature of the hair to the body makes wearing it a most uncomfortable and alarming experience; the wearer is trapped under its weight and isolated.⁷⁵ Rijkeboer's reference to our fear of burqas is apt since it raises some contentious issues. Does the burqa's ability to disguise identity expose and increase women's vulnerability? The fact that *Burka* is constructed solely of hair enables it to be seen as an embodiment of 'woman', and therefore provokes simultaneous questioning of notions of 'woman' as a subject and the female body as an object. Rather than setting up a polarity of self and other, boundaries between the subject and object appear blurred.

Through its disruption of preconceptions of femininity and the beauty of the female body, *Burka* seems to propose an alternative to the smooth, hairless and slim models associated with contemporary female beauty. The hairy exterior has the potential to conceal a real woman with physical foibles. As in *Home Sweet Home*, where the

⁷² Leila Hessini discusses this in 'Wearing the Hijab in Contemporary Morocco: Choice and Identity', in *Reconstructing Gender in The Middle East: Tradition, Identity, and Power*, ed. by Fatma Göçek, and Shira Balaghi, (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 40-56 (pp. 50-1).

⁷³ To give an idea of the laborious nature of this work, Rijkeboer was able to spin and knit only 1centimetre of hair each day. (Verbal communication with the artist April 2009.)

⁷⁴ Appendix 1.

⁷⁵ My personal experience of wearing this knitted burqa at Rijkeboer's studio in April 2009, and which I was unable to remove unaided.

empty houses/nests can symbolise relationships and voids, without a wearer or participant *Burka* remains an empty sculptural form. Woman as a particular gendered site may be absent, only her external cocooning or perceptions of her remain.⁷⁶

However, both inanimate and yet of the living body, *Burka* is richly resonant with issues of identity and loaded with gendered symbolic meanings.

Two years before *Burka*, Rijkeboer's installation *She Only Wanted a Boy* (2004) [Figure 1.12], explored another extremely relevant and controversial aspect of gender. With advances in scientific knowledge, manipulation of DNA for *in vitro* fertilisation has become increasingly visible in the twenty-first century. From the late 1950s ultrasound technology was available during pregnancy for obstetric diagnostics, and more recently has enabled the expectant mother to realise the gender of her unborn child.⁷⁷ With the advent of genetic prescreening at fertility clinics, prospective parents can choose the gender of the baby as well as screen out hereditary diseases.⁷⁸ When Rijkeboer's mother was pregnant with Chrystl and her three sisters, she knitted only boy's clothes. Then later, when her own daughters became pregnant she again knitted boy's clothes, but they too had daughters.⁷⁹ *She Only Wanted A Boy*, while making visible a personal narrative, evokes wider political contexts and raises the issue of gender preferences. Rijkeboer says: "This work is a protest against cultures and religions that attach more value to sons than to daughters. My own mother ...hoped to steer her fate."⁸⁰ From a set of double pointed knitting needles, a boy is produced. His feet, legs and lower torso have been fabricated but he remains incomplete with the

⁷⁶ Processes of wrapping and cocooning of the female are also depicted in Annegret Soltau's work, see Chapter Three.

⁷⁷ Issues of gender became increasingly important during the 1980s, for instance, in China's 'one child' policy. It has been suggested that it has led to the killing of some female infants because of the traditional preference for boys. See short report 'China Steps up 'One Child' Policy', *BBC News*, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/941511.stm>> [accessed 7 September 2010]

⁷⁸ Christine Borland in *Paradise Now: Picturing the Genetic Revolution*, ed. by Marvin Heiferman and Carole Kismaric, (Saratoga Springs: Tang Teaching Museum, 2002), p. 42.

⁷⁹ Gibbons, (12 September 2009).

⁸⁰ Rijkeboer, (2008), unpaginated.

ball of hair yarn hanging from the needles. Correspondences can be drawn between Rijkeboer's approach to this theme and that of her contemporary, Margi Geerlinks (b.1970, The Netherlands). Geerlinks also explores genetic manipulation of the unborn child and the human body through various handicraft pursuits associated with the female; embroidering (an ear), sewing (a boy), crocheting (a breast).⁸¹ In *Untitled (Mother Knitting Child)* (1998) [Figure 1.13], Geerlinks creates a digitally manipulated photograph of a daydreaming woman knitting a fantasy child.

Fanciful notions of perfect children are one part of a larger modern social illusion of the ideal self, of youthful looks and body perfection. This desire for an unrealistic physical appearance and associated lifestyle has been called the 'Barbie syndrome' after the doll of that name.⁸² Anti-ageing concerns are now part of modern social culture, often focussed on women. Ageing, or attempts to halt this process through anti-ageing techniques and lotions is the obvious subject in Rijkeboer's *Forever Young* (2001) [Figure 1.14]. In this piece hair can be seen not only as a metonym for the dying body, but conversely it also acts as a metaphor for the beauty industry in general.⁸³ Containing innumerable lotions, potions, pills and syringes, we are reminded of the irony of such products as the artist houses them in a cupboard covered in hair. Current tendencies to alter or in some way edit our bodies has antecedents from at least as far back as in Ancient Egypt, from where archaeologists have found evidence of cosmetics. Practices of anointing and mummification of the dead body also have a long history, while preservation of the female body in other

⁸¹ Margi Geerlinks, *Crafting Humanity*, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Torch Books, 2001).

⁸² In 1965 a 'Slumber Party Barbie' doll was produced complete with a book titled 'How to lose weight', and following which the phrase 'Barbie Syndrome' was conceived. Numerous articles have been written about Barbie and Barbie Syndrome, see, for instance, Ann DuCille, 'Dyes and Dolls: Multicultural Barbie and the Merchandising of Difference', *Differences*, 6.1 (Spring, 1994), 47-67.

⁸³ The phrase 'I'm having a bad hair day' has come to be used as a subjective comment on one's appearance, often inferring lack of confidence and a general dissatisfaction with one's performance.

scenarios is also found in fairytales.⁸⁴ These are often rife with gendered stories of cruelty and occasional happy endings, and in the following section I examine how Rijkeboer explores this theme.

Hair and Fairytales

Art historian Rosemary Betterton has suggested that fairytales are stories with “a sense of proper origin and ending”, and often include a stepmother figure whose interference in the lives of the other characters is only resolved through the handsome prince figure.⁸⁵ In a similar vein, Warner suggests that in the Rapunzel story imprisonment may be more to do with the sometimes difficult relationship between a stepmother/mother-in-law and stepdaughter/daughter-in-law.⁸⁶

Motherhood and its adjunct the stepmother are often central to fairytales such as Cinderella or Rapunzel, where the young woman escapes her present confines to live a new life. Although leaving home can signify breaking connections and interdependencies, it can also refer to escape from imprisonment. Rijkeboer explores some of the constraints of family ties in a series of works loosely themed around the story of Rapunzel. As a site-specific installation Rijkeboer crocheted a seven-metre ladder of human hair to hang from a turret opening at the Dutch ruin of Brederode.⁸⁷ This work, *R's Escape* (2008) [Figure 1.15], can be seen to explore the theme of the female trapped by her femininity and her female connections, specifically her mother

⁸⁴ For instance *Sleeping Beauty*.

⁸⁵ Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and The Body*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 119.

⁸⁶ Warner, (1995), p. 219.

⁸⁷ Brederode was built to control the road to Kennemerland region in North Holland, and begun in 1282 by Willem van Brederode. It was variously besieged by local and foreign troops, then restored to some extent during the nineteenth century, but is now in ruins in the sand dunes. As a child Rijkeboer played here.

<<http://www.tacohermans.nl/bredeng.htm> and <http://www.tacohermans.nl/bredeng.htm>> [accessed 1 September 2010]

(symbolised in the umbilical form of the plaited hair). Rijkeboer says:

“I felt connected to the fate of these girls (*Rapunzel and Red Riding Hood*). While both fought primarily with their mothers, they do not turn their backs on their families; to them family ties are inalienable.”⁸⁸

In the fairytale Rapunzel lets down her hair in order for the witch to climb up the tower, so conversely her hair could also be a means of escape, albeit not in this depiction; the hair in *R's Escape* has become disassociated with its body (or mother). Towers such as the one at Brederode ensure a polarity that Bachelard identifies as being significant in understanding the physical poetics and space of the house, and in abstract terms, the imagination. At one extreme is the attic, at the other the cellar, and so it is in *R's Escape*; the ladder stretches from one to the other. The attic is open to the rafters, or in this case the turret opens to the sky, an altogether more positive place than the dark, enclosed cellar.

“In the attic, the day's experiences can always efface the fears of night. In the cellar, darkness prevails both day and night, and even when we are carrying a lighted candle, we see shadows dancing on dark walls.”⁸⁹

This ambiguity is echoed in the title of the work as Rijkeboer explains her intention that “‘R’ stands for Rapunzel and Rijkeboer.”⁹⁰ It would seem that what we understand as favourable (the attic) is closely associated with doubts and uncertainties (the cellar). *R's Escape* can be seen to reflect on the binaries of dependence/independence, and youth/maturity that are inherent in mother/child relationships, and which draw on the first binary of life/death. Whilst redolent with nostalgia and the fantasy of fairytale, the decaying building in *R's Escape* can be seen to mirror the breaking down of familial relationships, or the dead body through the metonym of hair. If hair is acknowledged as synonymous with death, then we

⁸⁸ Rijkeboer, ‘Chrystl Rijkeboer: Home’, (undated), my italics in parenthesis.

⁸⁹ Bachelard, (1994), p. 19.

⁹⁰ Rijkeboer, ‘Chrystl Rijkeboer: Home’, (undated).

might see this work as suggestive of a liberation of the physical body through death. Rijkeboer's response to this fairytale can be interpreted in several ways.

Three more works on this same theme but incorporating ceramics, *All In The Family*, *Safe House* and *Rapunzel* (all 2010) also utilize symbols associated with long hair. *Rapunzel* [Figure 1.16], a wall relief, depicts a female figure sitting high up above the viewer within a foliated world of birds and flowers. She is both separated and joined by a dark plait of hair almost touching the ground. Recalling religious icons, she towers above her audience, suggesting a distance between the spiritual and the secular. Drawing on our understanding and available iconography of time, fairytales, and the body, the arboreal Rapunzel asserts her connections to the past through the tangled ends/roots of the plait of hair, yet appears to move away from it in the open branches of the treetop.

Safe House [Figure 1.17], combines a jointed ceramic tower with a single thick plait of blond hair. Although this house appears secure and the painted vines and tendrils creeping up the tower are fixed within the ceramic glaze, the tendrils echo the loose hair at the end of the plait, and remind us of fronds and plant life on the seabed, or of Bachelard's dark and irrational cellars. The black glazed base of the tower becomes an ambiguous location of neither earth nor murky depths, and complicates our understanding of the work until it becomes impossible to distinguish between safety and advancing fears of confinement. Combining elements of both male and female, the phallic tower and the feminine hair in this work reach an almost uneasy stasis. In gendered terms the symbolic positions of male and female appear fixed. The marked polarity of the more pliable and flexible hair (female) to the hard fired clay form (male) draws our attention to this difference, and references traditional perceptions of

the soft flesh of the female body compared to that of the male. In contrast *All in the Family* [Figure 1.18], evokes more fluid notions of identity within a fairytale context. Here an enormous bell cord of hair is attached to a ceramic bell. As a rich metaphor for communication, bell cords conjure relationships between those who pull the cord and those who respond to or ignore it, and these questions of communication remind us of the vulnerability of being incommunicado or isolated. The cord is also suggestive of the implicit awareness, here through pre-language communication, of the mother-child dyad as Rijkeboer's metaphors suggest the extent and influence of this key relationship. She says of her own mother:

"She would be knitting and embroidering all night long, to tame her (literally) growing anxiety and fear. This compulsive handiwork led to a series of bell cords. The enormous length of this cord says something about the scope and force of her power."⁹¹

Through associations with children's stories, fairytales can suggest a more playful approach to the issues Rijkeboer addresses. However, their dark undercurrent, seen for instance in *Kiss of the Wolf* (2010) [Figure 1.19], reminds us of the dangers lurking within notions of innocence. In this work, a cape knitted with human hair is lined with wigs. The ominous outer coat reveals an inner more bestial creature that also has human characteristics, and recalls Rijkeboer's earlier works conjuring memories of the Holocaust. The kiss of the wolf may literally foretell death; in the fairytale the Wolf tries to appease his hunger by eating grandmother, then hopes to eat Little Red Riding Hood. The traditional cape of Red Riding Hood is combined with the wolf in a legendary metaphor that collapses the dualism of innocence and guilt. Warner has explored several interpretations of this fairytale; one reading suggests Red Riding Hood and her grandmother become one in an ancestral line

⁹¹ Rijkeboer, 'Chrystl Rijkeboer: Home', (undated).

while the wolf represents the barbaric natives in the wild countryside.⁹² Charles Perrault cautions us at the end of his adaptation of the story against the smooth-talking, charming wolf that may be even more dangerous than the hairy wolf with enormous teeth.⁹³ This wolf, according to Perrault, “no longer stands for the savage wilderness, but for the deceptions of the city and the men who wield authority in it.”⁹⁴ Contrary to the Grimm Brothers version, there is no gallant huntsman to save them from death in this reading. Here ‘woman’ is vulnerable to the power of both uncivilized savagery and civilized suaveness. I suggest that Rijkeboer’s recourse to fairytales challenges more generic questions of innocence versus guilt or good versus evil, and is suggestive of personal and social exertions of power, and their gendered implications. The following section investigates a related ethical question concerning the use and power of genetic information, and how this can raise issues of racial discrimination when found in embodied experiences rather than fairytale depictions.

Seriality, Cloning and Archiving Identity

Deoxyribonucleic acid or DNA as it is commonly known is the hereditary material in humans, and which is stored as genetic information in our individual DNA profiles. Blood, bone, hair and other body tissues are all possible sites for DNA analysis, and of use in finding similarities amongst the human race as well as differences. Used in other ways, DNA is key to gene manipulation and cloning. Broadly speaking, from the eighteenth century biological differences have increasingly become confused with cultural differences, and race has tended to be seen as the key factor in various

⁹² Warner, (1995), p. 184.

⁹³ Charles Perrault, *The Complete Fairytales*, trans. by Christopher Betts, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 103. See also <<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0333.html>> [accessed 21 September 2010]

⁹⁴ Warner, (1995), p. 183.

forms of classification. As a result hair colour was often treated as a basic indicator of racial identity.⁹⁵ Although this determinism has now been largely discredited, Cheang explains its ramifications:

“Concepts of race have led to the erroneous, deeply prejudiced and highly damaging notions that, for example, black people or Jewish people were not merely culturally different but also fundamentally inferior to white people by birth, biology and nature.”⁹⁶

Rijkeboer’s exploration and treatment of this topic can be traced back to her *Onschuld* series. I suggest that her use of hair and teeth in *Onschuld* (1998) [Figure 1.20] can be seen as a blueprint for related works. Both materials – hair and teeth – contain vital genetic clues as markers of identity.⁹⁷ Reminiscent of a decapitated or mutated head this toothed hairball (and similar to the heads in *Installatie Onschuld*) uses the genetic material of strangers, and when exhibited *en masse* such as in *Heaven or Hell I, II and III* (2003) [Figure 1.21], can suggest armies, nations or even charnel houses.⁹⁸ If hair is taken as a metonym for the body then the variations in hair colour can be seen as symbolic of refining mechanisms associated with racial and cultural identity. Hairballs in the first box are of a relatively uniform brown, in the second box they vary from dark to light grey and brown, blonde and auburn. In the third box the hairballs are all tones of white. Filtering colour in this way can also suggest perceived preferences for blonde hair over brunette, and even mirror culturally defined skin colour preferences and prejudices.

Rijkeboer’s fascination with repetition, apart from her specific use of hair, is most apparent in her exploration of clones. Her *Baalbushka and Babooska* (2003) [Figure

⁹⁵ Cheang in Biddle-Perry and Cheang, (2008), pp. 28-9.

⁹⁶ Cheang in Biddle-Perry and Cheang, (2008), p. 29.

⁹⁷ The teeth used in the majority of Rijkeboer’s works are not human teeth, but plastic casts made by the artist.

⁹⁸ This could be said of the work of several other artists who assemble multiple figures; Antony Gormley’s touring installation *Field* (1991-) is one example.

1.22], draws on the form of the Russian doll, but unlike the Russian Matroyshka, these are not nesting figures. Fabricated from hair with hand-painted moulded plaster faces, *Baalbushka* has an open mouth and protruding tongue, while *Babooska* has tightly pursed lips, and Rijkeboer's titling plays on the Babushka doll (sometimes used as an alternative name for the Matroyshka).⁹⁹ Their facial expressions suggest angry masks, although Rijkeboer says that for her: "They have so little meaning, the rhythm of repetition is the important thing about them."¹⁰⁰ In some exhibitions, they have been grouped on the floor, in others, on small brackets across a wall. By spacing them thus, a sense of isolation and vulnerability is conveyed, as well as a visual musicality, evoked in the perceived tension between the sculptural space of each doll and their relational proximity to one another. Packed into tight rows on the gallery floor, the figures acquire other connotations. As if assembled for an unspoken purpose, their aggressive facial expressions are full of unnerving menace. Massed, these dolls present the notion of strength in numbers such as that evoked by the Chinese terracotta army exhibited at The British Museum, or Antony Gormley's *Field For The British Isles* (1993).¹⁰¹ Such art works allow the spectator to reflect on how we are subjected/subject ourselves to questions of belonging, individuality, and exclusion, and remind us of the importance of identity and difference. Rijkeboer's dolls return the viewer's gaze, much as Gormley's figures appear to. Gormley makes a point when discussing *Field* that could also be put to Rijkeboer's *Baalbushka* and *Babooska*:

"Here are the spirits of the ancestors and the spirits of the unborn. You are the conscious layer in this stratification of mind that we call human being - what are

⁹⁹ Matroyshka is thought to come from the girl's name Matryona or Matriyosha, and derived from the Latin 'mater' meaning mother. Babushka is grandmother in Russian. Nesting dolls are often associated with motherhood and fertility in folk art.

<<http://www.russianlegacy.com/nestingdolls.htm>> [accessed 28 October 2010]

¹⁰⁰ Appendix 1.

¹⁰¹ The British Museum held exhibitions of both. *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army* (13 September 2007-6 April 2008). *Field For The British Isles* (15 November 2002-26 January 2003).

you going to do about it?"¹⁰²

Although *Baalbushka and Babooska* initially might look like playful dolls, their excessive hairiness subverts this notion, raising other issues, including cloning, and provokes questions on the stability of our own embodiment, and moral compass. Also, the repeated physical acts of making these humanoids might be seen as amassing time and labour similar to that of a production line. Factory processes produce repeated single consumer objects, but Rijkeboer's objects suggest an underlying obsessive repetition for its own sake. By inducing passivity in the worker through the rhythm of repetition, mechanics involved in such fabrication also foreground explorations of sequences and procedures, including emphasizing the laborious nature of art. What appears to be a readymade is not readily made. In these multiples the concept of the artwork moves away from the perceived notion of the unique quality of an individual piece towards the ubiquitous. Although each doll is 'handmade', the accumulation of them over time might be suggestive of excess, about which Rijkeboer says: "Its like a factory production line, they're coming out more and more. There's no ending to it; it's overwhelming."¹⁰³ As a consequence of this, *Baalbushka and Babooska* might be seen to threaten to subsume both artist and audience. Congruous with this is Rijkeboer's serial use of hair that also begins with the individual but loses its visible uniqueness in the artistic processes involved. At the same time it retains its potential for identifying the head from which it came. The power of hair is such that production processes may change its visual appearance but the trace of the individual remains. Conversely, hair acts as a constant reminder that each individual is one of many millions, and like Rijkeboer's *Baalbushkas* and *Babooskas*, we are almost totally genetically identical. Although genetic accounting

¹⁰² Michael Spens, 'Antony Gormley: Field For The British Isles', *Studio International*, (22 January 2003), <http://www.studio-international.co.uk/sculpture/gormley_a.asp> [accessed 29 November 2010]

¹⁰³ Appendix 1.

suggests humans are 99.9% similar,¹⁰⁴ I suggest that identity is very important to the individual, and hair offers a means of representing ourselves as a tiny fleeting component of a larger humanity. In *Baalbushka and Babooska* Rijkeboer can be seen to demonstrate the ephemerality of the singular embodied being, as well as collective similarities.

Hair and Portraiture

Since the successful mapping of the human genome during the late 1990s and early part of 2000 science/arts collaborations have begun to investigate responses to the recent trends in genetic and genome research. In April 2002 an exhibition opened at the Henry Art Gallery in Seattle, USA as a joint enquiry into social, legal and ethical questions on the topic. An anonymous quotation from a staff member engaged on the project and exhibition *Gene(sis): Contemporary Art Explores Human Genomics*,¹⁰⁵ explained what role art might play in this quest:

“Visual metaphors in contemporary art can provide new ways of approaching this important civic issue and offer the general public a point of entry into these questions.”¹⁰⁶

Other contemporary artists have made use of their DNA to explore issues of identity, and *Self* (1991-) [Figure 1.23] by Marc Quinn (b. 1964, British) is possibly one of the most recognised artworks on this theme. His on-going project is literally a signature

¹⁰⁴ Statistics from *Exit Art Archive*, (2000) <http://www.exitart.org/exit_archive/history/2000.html> [accessed 27 July 2011]

¹⁰⁵ The exhibition ran from 6 April-25 August 2002. An earlier travelling exhibition *Paradise Now: Picturing the Genetic Revolution* was shown at Exit Art, New York, University of Michigan Museum of Art, and the Tang Museum, Skidmore College between 2000-2002. See *Paradise Now* ed. by Heiferman and Kismaric, (2002) for several stimulating essays on this topic.

¹⁰⁶ Lynn E Stern, ‘The Gene(sis) Project: A Laboratory for Arts-Based Civic Dialogue Case Study: Henry Art Gallery’, *Animating Democracy E-news*, (January 2005), p. 5. Stern explains Seattle’s particular interest as being a leading centre for biotech research and innovation in America. Twenty eight US and European artists participated in this exhibition. <www.AmericansForTheArts.org> [accessed 1 September 2010]

work. By collecting his own blood over a period of months at five-year intervals, Quinn has produced several refrigerated casts of his head. His preoccupation with the mutability of the body, and therefore identity, is also seen in his portrait *Sir John Edward Sulston* (2001) [Figure 1.24], which comprises a sample of Sulston's DNA in agar jelly.¹⁰⁷ Like Quinn, Rijkeboer can also be seen to explore possible aesthetic responses to current usage of DNA. However, where Quinn uses his own blood/DNA or Sulston's in that particular portrait, Rijkeboer uses anonymous hair/DNA, which evokes other more nuanced representations of gene manipulation (rather than actually growing DNA as Quinn does for *Sir John Edward Sulston*).¹⁰⁸ For Quinn it would seem that the individuality of the portrait is a key factor of each work – indeed they are portraits, and portraits usually refer to named people. By contrast, I argue that Rijkeboer makes her concerns effective by using hair as a carrier of DNA – so that each artwork regardless of its formal aesthetic can be thought of as a collection of potentially retrievable data. In some ways, the idea that this is unlikely to occur emphasises tensions between portraying an individual and maintaining anonymity.

In June 2005 Rijkeboer exhibited the project *Stolen Identities* in Toronto.¹⁰⁹ This installation comprised life-sized photographic transfers on semi-transparent panels, free-hanging in a gallery space, with an accompanying video. The latter, *Stolen Identity* (2005), films a hand roughly cutting the hair of several people, which appears to be almost simultaneously spun into hair yarn. With their backs to the camera, the identities of the different people in the chair are invisible. We are unable

¹⁰⁷ This work was commissioned by and is currently exhibited at The National Portrait Gallery, London. "The portrait was made by our standard methods for DNA cloning," writes Sulston. "My DNA was broken randomly into segments, and treated so that they could be replicated in bacteria. The bacteria containing the DNA segments were spread out on agar jelly in the plate you see in the portrait." "The transparent entities are colonies of bacteria each grown from a single cell containing a part of Sulston's DNA; at the point of visibility their growth was stopped." Jonathan Jones, 'John Sulston, Marc Quinn (2001)', *The Guardian*, (Saturday 22 September 2001).

¹⁰⁸ As part of her art training Rijkeboer wrote an essay on Quinn's self-portraits.

¹⁰⁹ Offthemap Gallery, Toronto.

to surmise their emotions at this occurrence, or whether they are being shorn willingly or unwillingly, but the accompanying images enable the audience to make connections between the cut and spun hair with the hairy balaclavas in the photographs. The photographs include a family group, a wedding couple, and several individual portraits.¹¹⁰ In *Family Portrait* [Figure 1.25], what appear to be a man, woman and two children pose for a traditional family photograph. All four wear ursine balaclavas with only their eyes visible. Similarly, in *The Wedding* [Figure 1.26] we are unable to identify the couple through their masks. The tradition of knitted balaclavas, once worn for protection and warmth, are now associated with robbery, violence or terrorism and designed to hide identity. These family photographs are not of the type usually shared among friends and family; they are underlaid by suggestions of secrecy and danger. Rijkeboer's *Avatar* series of balaclavas (2006) [Figures 1.27 and 1.28] takes this concept further through the construction of facial features in coloured and knitted hair.¹¹¹ The term 'avatar' derives from the Sanskrit *avatāra*, meaning descent, and in Hindu culture is understood as an incarnation or embodiment of a person or idea. In *The Ten Avatars of Vishnu* (c. 1850-70) (held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London), the avatars are painted as reincarnations of the deity Vishnu.¹¹² Contemporary avatars may represent an incarnation of the individual in cyberspace, for instance in web groups on the internet or as identities in computer games, and like masks they

¹¹⁰ Gillian Rose, *Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, The Public and The Politics of Sentiment*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), especially pp. 61-22, gives a useful background to family photographs in terms of a visual economy. *Cartes de Visite* were taken by anthropological explorers from the mid-nineteenth century as visual records that both typified and compared different nations, with collecting, archiving and visual displays in exhibitions important tangents from this. Their popularity increased as celebrity and family portraits as these small cards were both cheap and readily available as serial images.

¹¹¹ This series comprises seven different avatars, and the coloured hair came from a local wigmaker. Rijkeboer's models wore their preferred avatar for her photographic records.

¹¹² <<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O81804/painting-the-ten-avatars-of-vishnu/>>. Museum number D.416-1889. [accessed 25 August 2010]

schematize character types.¹¹³

While the holes for eyes and mouth give access to the person beneath, Rijkeboer's portrayals allow us to understand the works as ideas of a person (an avatar). The *Avatar* series and the *Stolen Identities* project enable us to explore combinations of hair with concepts of technology in relation to the self and human identity. These masks however also evoke repulsion through the hair and its symbolic status as an abject material of the body. Disturbing our perceptions of the internal and external, both masks and avatars confuse the boundaries and limits of the body, and the 'real' body with its simulacra. Pain experienced by the bristly hair challenges perceptions of it as soft and malleable, and the actual wearing of masks and avatars can be seen to question our notions of selfhood and how we portray and present ourselves as individuals.

Investigating the use of masking and masquerade in contemporary Europe, the anthropologist Cesare Poppi concluded that masquerading establishes correspondences between the seasonal cycle and 'the sociological passages' of human generations."¹¹⁴ In other words he draws a correlation between our seasonal (and often religious) feasts such as Halloween, Lent and Shrove Tuesday, and the human life cycle. Nowhere is the life cycle more apparent for us than in the family where our own lives, children, and ancestors combine, and where the life cycle of hair could be seen as a microcosm of the human life cycle. If the mask can be seen as a mechanism for ordering our world through both the transformation and fixing of

¹¹³ A concept of portraiture that seeks to disguise by substituting the self by a symbol. In digital technology avatars are used instead of portrait photographs, and remove the avatar owner further from the lived experience.

¹¹⁴ Cesare Poppi, 'The Other Within: Masks and Masquerades in Europe', in *Masks: The Art of Expression*, ed. by John Mack, (London: British Museum, 1998), pp. 191-215 (p. 210). Arnold Van Gennep (1873-1957) was a French ethnographer and folklorist.

identity, then it may also take on symbolic references of its time, as we can see in Rijkeboer's *Avatars*. Roman masks of the first and second centuries AD, for instance, often utilized wide staring eyes and gaping mouths not dissimilar to the *Avatars* for their tragic theatre, whilst those from the Pacific islands of New Caledonia although carved from wood include human hair on the head and beard, and sometimes were used in mourning ceremonies.¹¹⁵ Rijkeboer's work relating to portraiture can be seen to explore the axes between what we perceive to be portraiture, for instance, in a wedding or family photograph where we expect to see not only the features of the individuals, but often some emotional response to the event/portrait, as well as their hair and clothing. When faces are hidden or disguised by hair, it obscures the personality of the portrayed person, rather than adding to it. Rijkeboer might be seen to question notions of what occurs between the visible and the hidden. Whilst the portrait may individualize, anonymity can facilitate integration (into living or digital communities) as well as loss of selfhood, again raising questions about our social need for both individuality and a sense of affiliation and belonging.

Subtle oscillations between the past and the present are apparent as Rijkeboer makes recourse to current technology while exploiting time. I have already argued that her use of hair evokes temporal connections between generations and time-lines. *Perfect Strangers* (2004) [Figure 1.29], is another such work, rich with historic associations, yet made of hair from the living. Over-size figures of a man and a woman lie together on the gallery floor, bands of different hair colours striping the bodies. These crochet casings appear as shrunken and wrinkled corpses; as empty bodies. Differences between surface and volume become apparent, and although hair is itself

¹¹⁵ Ian Jenkins, 'Face Value: The Mask in Greece and Rome', in *Masks* (see Poppi above), pp. 150-67, and Dorota Czarkowska Starzecka, 'Masks in Oceania', in *Masks* (see Poppi above), pp. 56-81.

a liminal material, its fabrication here can be seen to almost deny it this singular quality. Twists and indents, particularly in the arms of the figures, evoke the remains of naturally preserved bodies from peat bogs.¹¹⁶ Shading in the brown and grey hair is reminiscent of stained skin tones, a natural consequence of being buried in sand or other dry material.¹¹⁷ The thoughtful gaze in the half-open mouth and furrowed brow of the male intimate the vulnerability of ageing and loss of physical presence. As the male and female lie close together on the floor, they suggest an ancestral line that in Christian terms recalls Adam and Eve.¹¹⁸ Unlike historical perceptions of portraiture as physical likenesses of individuals or as iconographic representations of the sitters' social position, these are generic portraits. In Rijkeboer's work, hair acts as an equalizer of gender, race, ethnicity and social status; all are amalgamated, while binaries such as those of man/woman, and victim/aggressor are subverted.

In 2007 *Perfect Strangers* was exhibited in the Grote Kerk, Alkmaar in Holland. Dating back to the fifteenth century, the historic fabric of this church has been subject to several restorations, whilst from the mid-1990s the interior has been used as a cultural centre for exhibitions, fairs and concerts. Resting on the historic floor of the church with its medieval grave slabs and inscriptions, *Perfect Strangers* can be seen in this specific context to articulate what Marsha Meskimmon describes as "the

¹¹⁶ When this work was first exhibited, Rijkeboer received comments that these bodies were like *veenlijken* or bog bodies, Appendix 1. One such specimen is that of a male, nicknamed 'Ginger' because of the remains of his golden curls, dated to c.3400 BC and currently held at The British Museum, London.

¹¹⁷ See the following webpage by leading Egyptologist Joann Fletcher for a fascinating glimpse into 'Ginger' and other burials. Archaeological evidence shows that even the less wealthy of the ancient Egyptians wore elaborate hairstyles. <<http://www.egyptorigins.org/ginger.htm>> [accessed 10 September 2010]

¹¹⁸ Historical effigial figures (mainly sculptural), were the subject of the exhibition *Image and Idol: Medieval Sculpture* (2001) at Tate Britain, but are much more likely to be found in a religious setting. See Richard Deacon, and Phillip Lindley, *Image and Idol: Medieval Sculpture*, (London: Tate, 2001). An interesting visual correlation can be drawn between the fragmented polychromy on the sculptures and the patchwork effect of *Perfect Strangers*.

threshold of embodied subjectivity.”¹¹⁹ Appropriating this notion for my argument, I suggest that the synergy between the body of hair (the body of and from many living bodies) and the bodies that lie beneath life (that is, lie dead under the floor in the crypt of the church below *Perfect Strangers*), enable several interpretations. The contradictions of the materiality of hair, as dead waste matter that appears as living material on the body, is mirrored in the building itself. Redundant religious practices of the church are now in a dialogue with the vibrant contemporary cultural environment of the building. Through the inter-relationships of ‘then’ and ‘now’, of history and technology and the lineal generations of humanity, evoked by the work and its site, a temporal dimension enabled in this piece reveals a need to belong to the past as well as a need to question it.

In the twenty-first century, our recent European past is present in numerous ways that we (are able to) live as the present through contemporary events. In this way the present can be a portrait of the past of all humanity. Occurrences such as the Holocaust are echoed in the continuation of violence and aggression towards the individual in disputes ranging from the war in Iraq, or allegations of war crimes against the peace-keeping forces of the Afghanistan conflict, to China’s ‘one-child’ policy, and alleged plans by a US church to burn copies of the Koran.¹²⁰ Rijkeboer has consistently stated that it is the contradictions of human nature that fascinate her. These might include innocence and loss of innocence, our desire for children, yet our sometimes-careless attitude to them, and our expectations of freedom to choose, including those related to ageing, beauty and genetics, and our fears (terrorism) and

¹¹⁹ Meskimmon, (2011), p. 38.

¹²⁰ This latter point is breaking news for 10 September 2010.

<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11260471>> [accessed 10 September 2010]

insecurities of identity.¹²¹ Social philosophers Gatens and Lloyd discuss this dualism through tensions between freedom and stability as being intrinsic to the constant flux of identity.¹²² Of the many contradictions of nature, hair as a bodily form – as metaphor and metonym – is possibly one of the easiest to understand yet one of the richest to explore in relation to identity. How different is what Rijkeboer describes as a contemporary ‘Barbie syndrome’, where the search for the perfect human being may lead to loss of individuality, or to ethnic cleansing? *Perfect Strangers* reminds us that humanity is constantly located at a threshold of choices. Rijkeboer’s art practices have shown these choices to be complex, and although often in tension with one another, are rarely simple oppositions. In relation to *Burka*, this can be seen as an investigation into obstacles that impede tolerance and receptiveness. Rijkeboer has recently said: “In my family all the unknown is frightful and therefore bad or not to be trusted. If it isn’t own (which means family, people you know or inside crowd) they react negatively and scared. I had to fight my way out of that thinking.”¹²³ Dynamics between the past and present, or in the life cycle can be instrumental to individual preferences and choices. Gatens frames it thus:

“In understanding how our past continues in our present we understand also the demands of responsibility for the past which we carry with us, the past in which our identities are formed. We are responsible for the past not because of what we as individuals have done, but because of what we are.”¹²⁴

I argue that *Perfect Strangers* can enable the viewer to make associations through both the personal and the political to the past by questioning notions of self. Integral to the physical characteristics of hair is a potential system of archiving identity, and into which Rijkeboer’s method of portraiture introduces disorder and confusion. Her

¹²¹ Rijkeboer, (2008). I am not suggesting these contradictions are solely in binaries or opposites, rather they can be explored as multiplicitous.

¹²² Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present*, (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 78.

¹²³ Appendix 1.

¹²⁴ Gatens and Lloyd, (1999), p.81.

artworks have the potential to provide genetic portraits of countless hitherto unknown individuals,¹²⁵ and this ability to evoke a nobler side to humanity is incongruous with the materiality of hair as an abject body waste. Where it was once discarded as detritus, Rijkeboer returns the physical hair/body to its original position as crucial to aesthetic, cultural and socio-political discourses.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored some of the ways that Chrystl Rijkeboer's art practices frame hair. Her obsessive use of it for more than a decade has shown that it can function as both a metaphor and a metonym of the body, particularly the female body. Issues of gender appear as a datum point, or given, in many of her pieces so that hair and feminist matters coalesce in different ways. In her earliest works hair can be seen as an embodiment of historic relevance in terms of the Holocaust, and specifically through a gendered perspective. This recurs in later works such as the video *Stolen Identity* when Rijkeboer literally spins the hair off the participant's head, and reminds us of some of the ways the body can be brutalized or viewed as a site or analogy of production. Drawing on the theme of home and the familial Rijkeboer creates objects that emphasize the binary of male/female and tensions around this, as the spectator is made aware of both the strength and the vulnerability of family relationships. Rijkeboer could be describing almost any family when she says of her own: "Families do not always like and love each other, but the family

¹²⁵ This occurs in monuments such as those to The Unknown Soldier, but in Rijkeboer's art this abstract notion becomes concrete. "The Westminster Abbey tomb was by no means the first to an unknown soldier (the idea appears to have originated with a Danish memorial erected in Fredericia in the 19th century), but it inspired a host of other such memorials throughout Europe and the US. There is an unknown French soldier of the Great War beneath the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, and unknown soldiers from several wars in the US national cemetery at Arlington, Virginia." <<http://www.icons.org.uk/theicons/collection/westminster-abbey/features/the-tomb-of-the-unknown-warrior-finished>> [accessed 28 October 2010]

bond is mostly too strong to really leave.”¹²⁶ Home is explored as a place of ruptures, not least through metaphoric associations to the female body/mother. Perceptions and expectations of identity and the individual are also developed in works such as *Avatar* and *Baalbushka and Babooska*. In these pieces, her recourse to masking and cloning remind the spectator that societal perceptions play a significant role in both contemporary life and cyberspace. Although she occasionally deals with her topics in a more playful way, for instance through fairytales and dolls, darker underlying concerns remind the viewer of Rijkeboer’s pre-occupation with social and cultural notions of good/evil.

¹²⁶ Appendix 1.

Chapter 2

Flow, Tangle and Coil: Alice Maher's Feminine Tresses

Introduction

"In the end, I couldn't get a fix on identity. But identity is not an end. Only a becoming."¹

"If Irish women have turned to the poetics and politics of the body, rather than the body politic, then the impetus is not to be found in a lack of political activist but it's to be found in the occupation of the site of some of the fiercest of Ireland's political battles, precisely the female body. An occupation enforced by the Church, both Protestant and Catholic, and policed by the state to be disempowered and silent."²

This chapter will investigate the Irish artist Alice Maher's strategies for deploying and framing hair. I will argue that her working processes and self-positioning within her cultural history can enable new readings of her work in relation to some of the serial strategies she uses. This chapter will also argue that Maher challenges the traditional positioning of the female artist, from where,

"patterns of activity, experiences of space and relationships to history, enmesh and unravel in continual flux... It is my wish, in making art, not to force conclusions, but to go on opening up and extending meaning."³

Although this statement was made more than fifteen years ago, it remains relevant to several of her works examined in this chapter. Whilst showing an awareness of historical contexts, Maher's aspiration to extend and develop rather than constrain interpretations of her work is clearly stated. I argue this is broadly achieved since the diversity of meaning suggested within each piece continues to be celebrated and

¹ Ailbhe Smyth, "The Floozie in the Jacuzzi: The Problematics of Culture and Identity for an Irish Woman...", in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, ed. by Hilary Robinson, (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), pp. 412-28 (p. 417).

² Hilary Robinson, *n.paradoxa*, 2, (Feb 1997), 48-54 (pp. 53-4).

<<http://www.ktpress.co.uk/nparadoxaissue2.pdf>> [accessed 20 July 2011]

³ From Alice Maher's statement submitted with the Douglas Hyde Gallery's nomination for her for the Glen Dimplex Award, September 1995, and made available to the author in 2007.

examined in numerous texts and exhibition catalogues, and lends some credence to Umberto Eco's argument that aesthetic validity increases in proportion to aesthetic interpretation.⁴ Maher's layering of symbolic meaning through her use of materials and titling of the works might be viewed as a palimpsest of identity and place, both enigmatic and ambiguous. As she declares, she spurns categorization, and it is this cerebral openness towards her art and its theorization that can be particularly seductive, prompting her audience to broader and deeper exploration.

Between 1974-8 Maher trained in European Studies in Limerick before going to art schools in Cork and Belfast during the early 1980s. She then lectured at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, and in 1993 began working full time in Ireland as a practicing artist. Fionna Barber aptly conceives of Maher's work as somewhere between subversion and transformation, the former term suggesting radical action and the latter, metamorphosis, sometimes associated with the inevitability of nature.⁵ Maher's materials of bees, leaves, thorns and hair subtly repeat within their own natural series and temporal cycles, and can be read as affective forces, to which the spectator responds.⁶ In those few pieces where Maher turns to the more traditional material of bronze, *Swimmers* (1996), *Venus* (1997), *Double Venus* (2005), and the sleeping girl figure in *Orsola* (2006), the reference to the female body is more literal. In many of her other works, her recourse to the broadly labelled 'expanded

⁴ See Chapter 1, note 12.

⁵ Fionna Barber, 'Familiar: Alice Maher, 1995', in *Sources in Irish Art: A Reader*, ed. by Fintan Cullen, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), pp.150-158.

⁶ I am informed here by Gilles Deleuze's theorization of the concepts of 'affect' and 'percept'. Affects occur through embodied encounters, and with things, events and situations. It might describe our wonder at events in the natural world, or the physical responses to the human touch, for instance, a kiss. As I apply these ideas, for example, in relation to *Keep* (1992), affects can be explained as sensations created by and in the work. We might recoil in loathing at the excess of hair, or conversely be drawn to touch its extreme hairiness. The significant point in terms of 'affect' is the sensations surrounding the perception of hairiness that is created, and this occurs through the hair or idea of hairiness. Our perceptions (of hair on the head, its softness, and so on) are disorganized through these sensate intensities, making us rethink what we 'know'.

field' might be seen to question the triad of traditional sculpture, the received positioning of the artist, and the art historian.⁷ This latter, as Rosalind Krauss suggests, searches for terminology to locate this 'expanded field' by calling upon historical antecedents as diverse as sculpture from world mysteries such as Stonehenge, to the early twentieth century or, as in Maher's work, from Greek myths to popular folktales. I shall argue that her appropriation of the more ephemeral or aesthetically liminal materials, often associated with the female, together with her serial strategies of collecting, appear to be at the heart of her engagement with installation art.⁸ In her challenge to traditional attitudes and the placing of Irish female artists, Maher's work will also be explored for its problematizing of the theme of Irishness.

Alice Maher's collecting of materials suggests both her engagement with the traces of rural Ireland and her attraction towards a notion of the serial. Serial collecting, and materials from nature and the body are combined with autobiographical references, and I will argue that this triad is at the core of Maher's aesthetic strategies and processes, underlying and informing other layers of interpretation that art historians and critics have brought to her art. As made clear by Siobhán Kilfeather, what makes Maher's work so potent is its ability to open up so many imaginative spaces.⁹

Maher's many statements of artistic intention can be understood as articulating tensions between the artist and the critic or viewer's readings of her work. During an interview with Maher, Cécile Bourne questions her expectations of these, and of the

⁷ Rosalind E. Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October*, 8, (Spring 1979), 30-44. The essay is also reproduced in Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, (Cambridge, Mass, and London: MIT Press, 1986), pp. 276-290.

⁸ Liminal materials not traditionally used in male artistic activities and, in this thesis, specifically those that refer to nature, the body and domesticity.

⁹ Siobhán Kilfeather, 'Alice Maher's Materials', in *Field Day Review*, ed. by Seamus Deane and Brendan Mac Suibhne, 2, (Dublin: Field Day Publications, 2006), 2-17 (p. 12).

dichotomy created between image and object, that appeals to what Maher describes as “a shelf of sensation somewhere between memory and experience.”¹⁰ With this in mind, this exploration of Maher’s art practices, whilst being informed by her writing, statements and autobiographical strategies, will acknowledge they are not, as Gill Perry said in 2004; “a necessary condition for reading the work.”¹¹

Four key themes will be addressed in this chapter: hair and seriality; myth and fairytales; the girl-child and feminine hair; and flows, streams and ‘becomings’ (drawing on theorizations by Deleuze and Guattari).¹² These themes have arisen from my research to date on the works themselves, from my discussions with Maher, and other interviews and statements, from previous literature including exhibition catalogues, her collection of materials and use of hair, and brief analysis of some of the more formal aspects of Classical Greek sculpted hair (that is to say sculpture from the fifth to the third centuries BC). The pieces discussed in this chapter include *Keep* (1992), *Folt* (1993), *Familiar I* (1994), *Swimmers* (1996), *Andromeda* (1997), *Double Venus* (2005) and *Orsola* (2006), although my discussions mainly focus on *Keep*, *Folt*, and *Familiar I*. Through these investigations, I intend to explore the ways hair can function as a metaphor for gendered experiences within the fields of art and memory. Issues of memory arise in many of Maher’s interviews, and her comment to Medb Ruane is one articulation of this fluid topic: “I used to think that

¹⁰ Cécile Bourne, ‘Interview’, in *Familiar: Alice Maher*, ed. by Fionna Barber, exh. cat. (Dublin: Douglas Hyde Gallery, 1995), pp. 22-7 (p. 23).

¹¹ Gill Perry, *Dream Houses: Installations and the Home*, in Perry and Wood, (2004), pp. 230-75 (p.239).

¹² Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (1972), trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, (London: Continuum, 2004a). Opposing Western thought, including concepts of their time such as phenomenology and structuralism, Deleuze and Guattari sought to interpret the world as a flow of experience. They argue that ‘becoming’ does not lead to an end point, but is rather a concept of productive flows, that is, becoming for itself. Becomings are not limited to one mode; language, for instance, can be inflected by every discipline in which it operates; computer terminology, science, medicine, nature and so on.

memory was like going back into yourself, that it was inside. Now I think that it's out there as well, like air."¹³

Hair and Seriality

In 1992 Maher was just beginning her artistic career, and often travelled between the cities of Belfast in the north of Ireland and Cork in the south. During that time she collected hair from hairdressers in both places, which she plaited over an inner core of hempen rope into *Keep* (1992) [Figure 2.1]. Unlike Rijkeboer, Maher never worked the hair waste through craft-based processes, rather, she re-presented these human remains in braids or tresses; hairstyles traditionally associated with women. Her serial use of materials was already becoming visible in other works around this time, for instance in *Cell* (1991), a ball of thorns on the scale of a human being, and also in several miniature organic works including *Bee Dress* and *Berry Dress* (both 1994), and *House of Thorns* and *Nettle Coat* (both 1995). At what point serial collecting merges with or becomes part of the laborious processes of making, such as plaiting hair for *Keep*, is not at issue here. Inevitably delineation between the two becomes blurred as one seeps into the other. And, as Maher suggests, it is the flow between these that stimulates a relationship between herself as the artist and her audience, and is what informs this chapter.

Maher's awareness of history is well documented, as is her love of collecting stories, particularly oral stories.¹⁴ Within popular storytelling a multitude of disparate elements come together in a narrative at a particular time. As well as the numerous

¹³ Medb Ruane, 'A Conversation with the artist', in *Profile 6-Alice Maher*, ed. by John O'Regan, exh. cat. (Kinsale: Gandon Editions, 1997), pp. 13-43 (p. 42).

¹⁴ Katy Deepwell, *Dialogues: Women Artists from Ireland*, (London and New York: I B Tauris, 2005), pp. 127-137.

locations of storytelling, the many variations of all the words spoken and heard, the understandings, reactions and sensations to the story have their own histories, whether concerned with myth or fairytale, or spoken to engender pleasure or fear. Part of the dynamic of the oral history is its ability to make sense of the world in which we live (as can fairytales), and the storyteller and the artist might be seen as performing a similar role. Stories that reference hair appear to be interwoven in Maher's art, as they can be seen to flow, tangle and coil as allegories within the images she creates. That which is recognizable in the work, in this instance, hair, might be seen to function as a key for the viewer, offering a language with which to interpret the world, albeit in individual ways. Perry aptly refers to it as "a curious, mischievous 'line' that pursues unexpected trails and perplexing transformations."¹⁵ Revisiting Maher's work often evokes retellings of familiar but fluid stories.

The serial strategies Maher employs are not premised on bald repetition or the copy, since that could suggest an original or ownership. Subtle differencing of the serial here might rather be considered through affiliations to the natural world. During the period of collection for *Keep*, the profusion of hair Maher accumulated is not only physical, but can be construed here, as it was identified in Rijkeboer's work albeit in different circumstances, as a metaphor for every embodied viewer. Identity of the unknown individuals from whom the hair was cut becomes entwined in Maher's hand into a physically cohesive strength and presence in the plaited braids of hair. Although normal visual differentiation between age, gender, class, religion, ethnicity or race, is impossible, the braids evoke a gendered perception of hair because of their figurative language. Through Western history alone, plaits of hair have sustained

¹⁵ Gill Perry, 'Tales, Trails and Transformations: The Work of Alice Maher', in *Alice Maher: Natural Artifice*, ed. by Nicola Coleby, exh. cat. (Brighton: Royal Pavilion Libraries and Museum, 2007), pp. 10-9 (p.18).

many revisions of socio-cultural functions and meanings. Their association with beauty and artifice has many historical echoes in visual and literary cultures, including Thomas Hardy's (1840-1928) *The Woodlanders* (1887). *The Woodlanders* was published at a time bulletins such as *The Journal of the Society of Arts* (first published 1852) carried articles and images about the hair trade, gendered through their direct appeal to feminine beauty. Poverty forced many women to sell their hair to women (and men) who could afford to buy it, thereby perpetuating the perceived importance of body image in which perfection, particularly for the female, and the denial of ageing, became increasingly prevalent in socio-cultural terms. Hardy's character Marty South, for instance, sells her tresses to Barber Percomb who then resells and arranges them as braided locks for the wealthy Mrs Charmond.¹⁶ If we consider Maher's strategies with hair in relation to this tale of perpetuation, *Keep* might be seen to evoke various histories of the commodification of hair, where Maher trades across ambiguous temporalities.

Braided ropes of hair in *Keep*, multiple images of hair in *Folt*, and the heads of nine *Swimmers*, imply a fascination, even obsession with hair by Maher, although it may be more about the female head than the materiality of hair.¹⁷ So, we must ask what it is about hair that has drawn Maher to both serially use and represent it in her art practice in so many of her works. In Deepwell's 2005 interview with her, a number of possibilities are suggested: its position in fairytales; its complex socio-cultural and historic connotations; and its liminality, that is to say, its borderline position on the body.¹⁸ This latter aspect can take hair to a place outside the pale, where wildness, excess and disgust go beyond the familiar. Body hair as opposed to hair on the head

¹⁶ Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, (London: Penguin, 1998), p.13. See Biddle-Perry and Cheang, (2008), p. 201, Fig.15.4, and several articles in *The Journal of the Society of Arts* between 1890-1917.

¹⁷ *Folt* translates from the Irish as tresses, abundance, weeds, or forests of hair.

¹⁸ Deepwell, (2005), pp. 128-129.

carries associations of insecurity of identity, and still engenders simultaneous feelings of triviality and disgust, often encouraging perceptions of the physical body as an embarrassment, and so denying it a perceived status of 'normal'. Maher repeatedly has insisted that her interest lies in the liminal spaces of nature and the body. She says:

"The high road isn't always the best way to a destination, I am a great one for the backroads myself, sometimes even crawling along the ditches and the neglected spaces to find the connectors and materials through which meaning can flow."¹⁹

In creating *Keep*, I suggest Maher has produced a visual corporeality that stimulates a proprioceptive and embodied urge. I use this physiological term here to describe how we relate to perceptions of parts of our body, and the way particular stimuli may arouse certain reactions in us. François Quiviger, for instance, relates proprioception to Renaissance artists' understanding of posture, but here I make use of it to describe the feeling that the amputated limb or part is still attached to the body, "causing at times sensations of pleasure or pain"²⁰ In this way, the hair we see in *Keep* is not ours, although it looks and feels like ours, stimulating sensations ranging from wonder to horror, especially in relation to excess dislocated from the body.²¹ The braids, held taut at top and bottom of the circular steel frame are comparable to the strings of, say, a harp, or a curtain or veil. Their tactility appeals to the viewer, to be touched or plucked, or even walked through.²² *Keep* seems to site the viewer as both subject and object in a self-reflexive relationship in which embodied viewers negotiate the boundaries of the body, where body and self are fluid. As Meskimmon

¹⁹ Alice Maher, 'Unstable Reservoir: The Future of the Past', in *Culture Matters Seminar*, Council of National Cultural Institutions, (April 3, 2007) <http://www.cnci.ie/CM_07/alice_maher.html> [accessed 20 June 2011]

²⁰ François Quiviger, 'Postural Sense and Human Figure in Renaissance Art', *Interdisciplines: Art and Cognition*, (2002) <<http://www.interdisciplines.org/>> [accessed 6 August 2009]

²¹ I have observed how at the mention of hair, our hands very often involuntarily touch it, confirming its presence, checking its appearance.

²² Maher has said that walking through the work particularly appeals to children viewing this piece.

says, “embodiment refutes the division of ‘mind’ from ‘body.’”²³ We might imagine the subjects whose hair has become bound in this work, how they worked, played, and slept, how their hair flowed or tangled. The initial circumstance of this hair has changed; now it is less a mnemonic of particular heads of hair from Belfast or Cork, than a descriptive object of corporeal association. Drawing from Meskimmon, but here in her reading of Butler, we are made aware of the body moving from a material reality within a social context to a dynamic site of interpretation of that same body.²⁴ In doing so, we no longer look at the individual identity of ‘man’ or ‘woman’ to which the hair belonged, but to the affects of the work and the potential meaning arising from and enabled by this.

The following year Maher produced *Folt* (1993) [Figure 2.2]; a series of six cases of gridded drawings of hair, together with a box of hair clippings, which like those in *Keep*, are braided together. Seriality in the formal arrangement of the two-dimensional hairstyles suggests identity as a site of revision, and Maher’s reliance on this particular strategy might be seen to echo cultural perceptions of women, and reflect images such as those found in popular magazines (some of which Ellen Gallagher uses in her work and which I discuss in Chapter Five). The almost simplistic drawings of hair recall gendered memories of brushing and plaiting, and of the child’s initiation into cultural forays of what might be the pleasures of pattern, style and fashion, of playing dolls and replaying life.²⁵ Maher can be seen to take as her datum some of these codes of femininity “that girls and women adopt in order to operate within a world that continually sites them outside of understanding.”²⁶

²³ Marsha Meskimmon, (2003), p. 76.

²⁴ Meskimmon, (2003), p. 79 quotes Judith Butler, see Meskimmon’s note 8, p.194.

²⁵ Fiona Barber, ‘Hybrid Histories’, in *Difference and Excess in Contemporary Art: The Visibility of Women’s Practice*, ed. by Gill Perry, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 88-103 (p. 101).

²⁶ Trisha Ziff, ‘Alice Maher’, <<http://www.zonezero.com/magazine/essays/distant/ymaher2.html>>

However, she can be seen to simultaneously critique these codes in the actual hair, which can be seen to operate as a metaphor of the liminal spaces of 'women', outside of understanding. These spaces that might be concerned with fantasies, fairytales, places of play, or of imagination, rather than the received conceptions of the 'reality' of the embodied experience.

The object (the braided hair) is also the subject of the work (drawings) and a metaphor for the gendered body. Discussing the positioning of the body for Irish women, Hilary Robinson says:

“Many Irish women return again and again to the body as the place from which – and the medium through which they must speak. Not as an unproblematic, pre-verbal or pre-patriarchal place of retreat, but as a site of struggle – struggle for control, struggle for meaning – from which it is important not to become alienated.”²⁷

As a metonym for the whole body, I suggest that the loose hair indicates ambiguities and struggles around notions of feminine identity that the six panels can only hint at through the schematic drawing style; that even a child can envisage too many choices and no 'right' answer when it comes to feminine identity. In her revisions of feminine imagery Maher's use of hair finds its alter ego lurking beside it, destabilising meaning even as she explores strategies of making meaning. As Cixous says of woman's never-ending *écriture féminine*,

“Her writing can only keep going, without ever inscribing or discerning contours.... She lets the other language speak-the language of 1,000 tongues which knows neither enclosure nor death.... Her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible.”²⁸

[accessed 7 January 2006]

²⁷ Hilary Robinson, 'Nine Snapshots from Ireland', *n.paradoxa*, 1 (1998), 24-30, (p. 30).

²⁸ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in *New French Feminisms; An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Press, 1981), pp. 259-269.

And, I propose that this is an aspect of her artistic strategies that Maher actively pursues; a lack of containment of the continual possibilities within the languages of art and potential meanings that arise from these.

I also suggest that the “impossibly long and writhing mass of physicality”²⁹ of the braid challenges our perceived knowledge by its affect.³⁰ That is to say that although the drawn images remind us of how hairstyles can change the way we look (one style may project sensuality, another innocence and so on), this learned knowledge that is centred on ‘good’ hair is destabilised by the sensations felt when viewing the actual physical excess of the braid. Confronted by this contrast between order and the disarray of the umbilical twists of actual hair, which Dalsimer and Kreilkamp call “the raw thing itself,” *Folt* becomes as much about our reactions to the body as about perceptions of femininity, as it evokes reminders of the vulnerable physicality of existence.³¹ The life cycle of hair echoing that of its embodied viewer emphasizes the almost indiscernible borders between the inner and outer body much as the hair in *Keep*. In the braided form, the viewer is reminded of innards spilling out, no longer restrained by the formal body. Maher’s statement when she describes hair as, “turning the body inside out...opening the forbidden chamber” has echoes of Kristeva’s thinking about the abject.³² Although the body is not literally an intact site with its orifices and blurred boundaries, in which hair is an active agent, I suggest that to treat it as otherwise would be to see it in a way counter to ‘normal’ perceptions of it. The knowledge that the body cannot permanently rid itself of its fluids, waste and other matter acts as a safeguard against them. As Kristeva says “On

²⁹ *Relocating History: An Exhibition of Work by 7 Irish Women Artists*, exh. cat. ed. by Fionna Barber, (Belfast: Fenderesky Gallery, 1993), [unpaginated].

³⁰ Affect here is again informed by a Deleuzian reading of the term. See note 6 of this chapter.

³¹ Adele Dalsimer and Vera Krielkamp, ‘Hair Pieces: Alice Maher’s Recent Art’, *Éire-Ireland*, (St Paul, Minnesota: Irish American Cultural Institute, 1999), 191-97 (p. 196).

³² Barber, in Perry, (2004), p. 101.

the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards.”³³ In drawing a correlation between the actual hair to the innards of the body, *Folt* might be seen as taking us towards the edge of existence.

Maher’s use of the Irish word ‘folt’ can also be seen to make possible other layers of interpretation. It conjures tresses, abundance or forests of hair that historically, “have long signalled women’s power to entrap men.”³⁴ Associated with the long flowing hair of the enchantresses Delilah, Salome, or Lorelei, the power of the curl or tress has been the subject of literature from Milton to Shakespeare as well as popular in fairytales.³⁵ Trisha Ziff, reflecting on Maher’s use of Irish, rich with issues of communication, loss and memory, sums up some of the complexities found in Maher’s work when she says: “the language of Irish and the language of hair are both embroiled in a dense thicket of history which involves the construction and loss of identity, as well as vast entanglements of shifting meanings.”³⁶

The formal shapes of the drawings of hair also show traces of Maher’s fascination with the discoidal whorls of nature, in particular the snail.³⁷ Inscribed spiralling forms recur on megalithic tombs and standing stones, and are common to Celtic countries, including Ireland and France.³⁸ Vestiges of religious nuances (often based

³³ Kristeva, (1982), p. 2.

³⁴ Jolly, (2004), p. 59.

³⁵ John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, William Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, see Jolly, (2004), note 60, (p. 71).

³⁶ Trisha Ziff, ‘Identity, Hybridity: Ideas Behind the Project’, <<http://www.zonezero.com/magazine/essays/distant/articfram2.html>> [accessed 15 October 2009]

³⁷ With its connection to the natural world, the snail finds a resonance in several of Maher’s works, specifically, *The Snail Chronicles* (2004), *Rood Installation*, *Four Directions*, *Snail Window* (all 2005), and *Snail Service* (2006).

³⁸ The tri-spiral design is one of the most famous symbols of the Newgrange Passage Tomb, County Meath, Ireland (c. 3200BC), and is remarkably similar to spirals on the Gavrinis Passage Tomb, France (c.5500BC). See amongst others, Michael J. O’Kelly, *Newgrange: Archaeology, Art and Legend*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982).

on earlier Celtic imagery) might be seen in the work too, underpinning and informing more contemporary constructions of gendered hair that Maher deploys to question the traditional positioning of the female (artist). *Folt's* tripartite quality, visible in the small images pinned out on the background of each box in three rows of three, is also found in the braid, which is traditionally formed of three strands. Maher's strategies with hair in this work, which echo and question the chaotic mess of the signs for the female body loosely held together through its labours, draw from unfixed and multifarious stories of myth and fairytale.

In *Familiar I* (1994) [Figure 2.3] Maher again returns to the body through the metaphor of hair and flax. I suggest the latter evokes a gendered legacy of the Irish linen industry, captured by artists such as William Hincks (fl.1773-1797), in a series of eighteenth-century prints on the manufacture of linen in Ireland at the end of the eighteenth century. Around that time the Irish Linen Board published a list of 60,000 workers in the linen industry in Ireland, confirming its importance as a national livelihood.³⁹ In Hincks' *Representing Spinning* (1791) [Figure 2.4], the spinners draw flax from their distaffs, held aloft to minimise tangles and assist the spinning.⁴⁰ Although a tentative and personal reading of these two works, I suggest that connections can be found between Hinck's illustration of the positioning of the eighteenth-century distaff, Maher's placing of the hanging flax, and the small girl in

³⁹ This list is considered to be a vital genealogical record for socio-historic research of this industry. <<http://www.failteromhat.com/flax1796.php>> [accessed 13 August 2009]

⁴⁰ The word distaff is thought to originate from the German *dise* for 'bunch of flax', and *staff* or *staef* comes from Old English usage concerning the female or distaff side of the family. This wider sense arose since spinning was usually carried out by women.

"distaff" *A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, ed. by Elizabeth Knowles, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t214.e2168>> [13 August 2009]

Representing Spinning is part of the V&A online collections, and available for viewing at <<http://www.vandaprints.com/image.php?id=12437&idx=1&fromsearch=true>> [accessed 13 August 2009]

the centre of the large red canvas in *Familiar I*. I continue my interpretation by suggesting that Maher's references go beyond a straightforward recall of an industry encouraged by British colonial policies.⁴¹ She invites the viewer to reflect upon a notion of (Irish) women forever tied to traditional work and place in society.

Dalsimer and Kreilkamp, Deepwell, and Barber, have all analyzed this work through what they read as a juxtaposition of minimalism and postmodernism in an 'art' context; each highlights the perceptual transformation that occurs to the spectator as the work is approached in the gallery space. Initially a red canvas appears to be adjacent to a mass of hanging flax, but on closer viewing a small figure of a girl materializes in the centre of the painting, a virginal slash of white against the red, and echoing the vaginal shape and state of the flax before it is spun into a more manageable material. Maher describes linen as "the exclusive cloth of our lives."⁴² Geographer Catherine Nash explains dress and national costume as a marker of national identity in Ireland during the early 1900s in the Gaelic revival, and Maher's use of red evokes this.⁴³ As Nash explains:

"In that movement, an emphasis on the red skirts of women was tied to the symbolism of the colour as an indication of vitality, to the belief in the national love of colour evident from ancient costume, and to the rejection of modern fashion, which was considered to restrict the female biological functions."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Nancy Edwards suggests that flax seeds initially may have been taken to Ireland from Roman Britain, see Nancy Edwards, 'The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland c.400-1169: Settlement and Economy', in *A New History of Ireland, Volume 1: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. by Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976-2005), pp. 235-300 (pp. 272-3).

⁴² Bourne, in Barber, (1995), p. 23.

⁴³ Maher explained in an interview with the author her reasons for using red in *Familiar I*: "I wanted to use this extremely rich pure pigment I had got, I wanted it to be all pervasive, I wanted also to refer to 'color-field' painting in the context of the history of painting (making a sideways jibe at it), I wanted to make this unending sea of feeling where floated this tiny female figure, a mere spot in the centre of the painting until you came closer to notice its true form (something you definitely would NOT see in a color-field painting)." Personal correspondence (28 October 2009).

⁴⁴ Catherine Nash, 'Remapping and Renaming: New Cartographies of Identity, Gender and Landscape in Ireland', *Feminist Review*, 44, (Summer 1993), 39-57 (pp. 45-7).

However, issues of seriality in relation to the flax and hair are the important issues for this study. As the flax is in a liminal state between nature and culture, harvested from its womb the field, but not yet spun nor in its finished state, can this girl be seen to be on the threshold of adolescence, or is Maher possibly questioning the demeaning culture of long hair competitions and beauty pageants? Like the flax, the girl/woman must undergo process and change, and flax as a representation of hair offers this possibility in a girl who also seems to reference Maher's *Thicket* series of drawings from 1990, as well as anticipate her *Swimmers* (1996) [Figure 2.5], as she slowly sinks to the bottom of the painting, with only her hair keeping her afloat.

Other correspondences between hair, gender and seriality might be found in the series 'woman' where from adolescence, girls enter the seriality of womanhood. Iris M. Young's thinking on women as social collectives offers an interesting argument that may throw new light onto some of Maher's pieces, in particular her practice of depicting multiple heads, for instance in *Swimmers*. Barber's reading of this work is through a version of the Greek myth of Aphrodite in which she is born from the foam around her father's genitals. Barber suggests that if a multiplicity of Aphrodites (or the corresponding Roman goddess Venus) had arisen from the water rather than a single figure, this might have impacted on depictions of what has existed in painting since the Renaissance of "an idealised secular femininity".⁴⁵ In what Kilfeather terms "the rejection of a single feminine principle", Maher depicts the feminine through a concept of multiplicity, and which I suggest evokes the heads in *Swimmers* as a collective or community through particular commonalities.⁴⁶ (Barber uses the term 'squadron' in relation to the multiple female heads.)⁴⁷ Explaining why she was

⁴⁵ Barber, (1995), p. 16.

⁴⁶ Kilfeather uses this phrase in Deane, (2006), p. 8.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

working in multiples in *Swimmers*, Maher says: "I didn't want to create an archetypal image of something- beauty or truth or whatever – so I was working in series."⁴⁸ Young argues that searching for commonalities when speaking of women (as a group) may be both reductive and exclusionary, but equally sees the sense in thinking of women as some kind of collective body.⁴⁹ The bronze heads of hair in *Swimmers*, floating face down on the gallery floor in a poignant stillness, can be seen to replicate a notion of the female as multiples in a series, as a collective body of women. Young interrogates what it means to be a woman in a group or a series, as she experiences "a serial interchangeability between myself and others."⁵⁰ Her ability to empathize with another woman/women is based on a common existence, not through a defining sense of personal or group identity, but as a background, "together in a series with others similarly positioned."⁵¹ It seems from this that a series can be read as a passive state of collectivity as opposed to the more active state of a group.

Another work in this series, a two-dimensional predecessor, *Swimmers* (1994) [Figure 2.6], portrays a group of painted heads partially submerged in a pool of water. While the formal spiralling lines and shapes of *Folt* have splashed over into this painting, the grid format has been washed away in an aura of subtle movement. Floating directionless, some of the heads gaze at the viewer, neither swimming nor drowning, and which Barber reads as cerebrality; these *thinking* swimmers, are 'measuring and weighing the world.'⁵² *Swimmers* (1996) as Maher describes, are all

⁴⁸ Ruane, in O'Regan, (1997), p. 16.

⁴⁹ Iris Marion Young, 'Gender as Seriality: Thinking about Women as a Social Collective', *Signs*, 19, 3, (Spring 1994), 713-38 (pp. 713-4). In support of her argument, Young explores Jean-Paul Sartre's discussion of serial collectivity in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960).

⁵⁰ Young, (Spring 1994), p. 731.

⁵¹ Young, (Spring, 1994), p. 726.

⁵² Barber, (1995), p. 16. I borrow Barber's emphasis on 'thinking' as she refers back to Maher's *Thicket* series of drawings (1990).

hair, “things growing like a virus or a mould, slugs or slime, leeches or rats.”⁵³ Her association of the female (through hair) connects the body to base matter such as mucus, decay and suckers, as something repulsive and hidden, and these swimmers are passively sequestered from the world (under their hair).

In Maher’s *Les Filles d’Ouranos* (1996) [Figure 2.7], fifteen painted resin heads, described by Perry as “a shoal of swimming Venuses,” actively search out their audience in the River Clain, near Poitiers, their faces partially above water, appearing as mischievous clones of Aphrodite.⁵⁴ Maher’s works often draw on memories from a time when imagination, inventiveness and dreaming for its own sake were found in her ingenuous childhood activities, adventures and stories, such as swimming in rivers, and playing in mud. In adult life, these states of creativity may become more intentional, loaded with inferences and influences as we respond to embodied experiences. Where repetition may be for its own sake in the patterns that arise from multiples, for instance, in *Swimmers* or *Les Filles d’Ouranos*, the impact of multiple figures evokes a correspondence with nature and the natural world, but also holds inferences to cloning, and to compliance. I suggest that Maher’s strategies with seriality and repetition enable these layers of possible meaning to surface, some of which are suggestive of a challenge to notions of ‘woman’, and even traditional perceptions of the woman who is an artist.

The problematic concept of Beauty associated with Venus is not to be found in the faces of Maher’s swimmers; these are ‘plain Janes’ with a harsh side parting. It

⁵³ Deepwell, (2005), p. 132.

⁵⁴ Perry, in Coleby, (2007), p. 16. Siobhán Kilfeather suggests Maher has encouraged reading this as a rejection of an originary single female muse, Kilfeather, in Deane and Mac Suibhne, (2006), p.8. Maher describes it as mirroring the Aphrodite myth but with fifteen heads rather than one, Barber, in Perry, (2004), p. 94.

might be argued that their potential beauty can be found in their seriality as a temporal collective community, reflecting on aimless childhood activities. Maher's serial strategies with hair in this series of works may have political resonances with her questions of female locatedness. For Maher, childhood in rural Ireland was a time of imagining, where "every stone had a story...In a country place, in the ditches, you make your own world by yourself, you create your own imaginative space."⁵⁵ Passivity associated with the rigours of repetition might be seen to enable spaces of dreaming; in Chapter One Rijkeboer suggests she does just that when she spins. Maher can be seen as claiming the right to an artistic space of her own making rather than one that has been chosen for her as a result of traditional art practices or the social and gendered placement of artists.

Myth and Fairytales

The enduring relevance of myths and fairytales is due in no small part to their ability to explain aspects of the natural world, rituals, or ideals of society; they are also enablers. As Warner says: "All the wonders that create the atmosphere of fairy tale disrupt the apprehensible world in order to open spaces for dreaming alternatives."⁵⁶ Deepwell makes a similar point in a different way, when she describes storytelling as "the great taboo of modernist painting concerns, because it's an allegory about the world."⁵⁷ She intimates that Maher negotiates new spaces of imagination in her aesthetic responses to fairytales and myth, and in this section I explore how they percolate through her strategies with hair to evoke or nurture transformation.

⁵⁵ Ruane, in O'Regan, (1997), p. 14.

⁵⁶ Warner, (1995), p. xvi.

⁵⁷ Deepwell, (2005), p. 130.

As a concept, the 'reality' of our embodied world has been under scrutiny from historians, philosophers and other scholars, and may have as many meanings as interrogators. One factor that must be taken into account is that every embodied being is a product of their 'world', subject to shifting influences and mores of socio-historical constructs, discourses, contexts, events and trends. Whitney Chadwick has discussed at length the assumptions that underlie the hierarchies of art history, from the subordination of the female artist in a sixteenth century Italian "master" workshop, such as that of Tintoretto, to the female artist as a producing subject, and the female as the object of representation.⁵⁸ She explains that although both Angelica Kauffmann (1741-1807) and Mary Moser (1744-1819) were among the founder members of The British Royal Academy, we know from *The Academicians of the Royal Academy* (1771-72) by Johann Zoffany (1733-1810) that because of the presence of a live nude male model they were consigned to appear as portraits on the wall rather than be painted as present in the assembled company of other Academicians. Thus, for the female artist, "Denied her individuality, she is displaced from being a producer and becomes instead a sign for male creativity."⁵⁹ Not only does the subjectivity of the female artist become subsumed as the object of the male gaze but also through his gaze, she is repositioned from the centre to the margin.

Whilst the first part of Chadwick's point may not be as applicable to the female artist in the first decade of the twenty-first century as it was in the eighteenth-century, in some areas of social leisure this disparity still remains, for instance in male-centred societies such as Freemasonry, gentlemen's clubs or the clichéd 'old-boy network'. However, it might be argued that the second part of Chadwick's statement still held some relevance in terms of aesthetic materials and techniques at least until the late

⁵⁸ Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), p. 7.

⁵⁹ Chadwick, (1990), p. 19.

1970s in England and Ireland, and I will argue that this is significant to Maher's strategies. Even when land art, performance art, film-making and feminist issues became more visible, textiles and ceramics were still regarded as feminine or 'craft-based' materials in Art Schools and to some extent, derided and despised as such.⁶⁰ Indeed, Linda Nochlin voiced this very concern in the mid 1970s when she suggested that the ambiguity surrounding embroidery was, "less conducive to fame and fortune than a career in painting or sculpture."⁶¹ Even so, this position would not have been possible without the women artists who had revolutionized the approach to decorative arts in the early twentieth-century. Amanda Vickery exposes this issue in a recent review of why sewing has again become fashionable. After many years of being seen as frivolous, a dainty hobby, or a means of enforced passivity, toil and subordination, Vickery, as Rozsika Parker before her in *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (1984), suggests it has become or has the possibility to be politicized.⁶²

Maher's involvement with hair reflects her acknowledged interest in the "common, the despised and the marginal, as well as the breaking down of 'high art' presumptions."⁶³ The marginal or 'other' can be traced as referential imagery and concepts in much of her art, and correspondingly, I argue that at the margin of the body, the liminality of hair can be seen to echo the liminality of the fairytale and the

⁶⁰ I refer here to my own experience of art school training in England in the mid 1970s. See also Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, (London: The Women's Press, 1984), p. 214, note 57.

⁶¹ *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, ed. by Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris, (Los Angeles: County Museum of Art, 1976), p. 61.

⁶² Amanda Vickery, 'A Stitch in Time', *The Guardian*, (17 October 2009), p. 18. Also, Parker, (1984), especially Chapter 8, pp. 189-215. Parker considers embroidery a naturally revolutionary art, in its timeless qualities, and its possibilities, for example, as a means of testament of survival and resistance in Nazi concentration camps and the suffrage movement. Vickery equates needlework to a weapon to subvert male authority in the battlefield of marriage, in Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009). pp. 249-50.

⁶³ Email communication with the artist 10 May 2007, submitted as Appendix A of the author's MA thesis, *The Open University*, (2007) (unpublished).

myth. Both straddle boundaries between nature and culture. Hair as a 'natural' product of the body is endlessly conditioned by culture. Fairytales and myths arguably have evolved through time, and take on characteristics of their period in order to contemporize them. For instance, many Walt Disney films re-affirm contemporary society's values in a format understandable by children, while referring directly to timeless human emotions and dilemmas. These fairytales have passed across cultural and geographical boundaries in fluid temporalities, hybrid scavengers mutating through villainy to virtue, in what Warner describes, as a gendered "language of the imagination."⁶⁴ Where the swathe of flax in *Familiar I* literally repositions the female from the centre of the painting to beyond the frame or margin, Maher draws our attention to the fairytales to which this work may be indebted. At the same time her rescue of the feminine symbolically locates it in a more flexible space where active dialogue with the spectator becomes possible. I suggest by this that Maher expresses two representations of the female. One is static in the picture plane under the gaze of the viewer. The other is in the flax, flowing loosely, evoking the potential of liberation while denying the viewer the possibility of gazing at an actual female body. The audience is offered a twice-removed reminder of the body; first through the flax as a mnemonic of hair, then through hair as a metaphor for the body. Vickery maintains that like the needle in sewing, "the distaff and the spinning wheel...could stand as an emblem for woman herself."⁶⁵ Although Maher relocates our gaze from the form of the girl-child onto a mythical or fairytale notion of the female body, I suggest she does so without fixing either. Rather, she subtly reminds her embodied viewer of some of the possible spaces of the feminine which she continues to challenge.

⁶⁴ Warner, (1995), p. xix.

⁶⁵ Vickery, (17 October 2009), p.18.

In 1976, the notion of female imagery or sensibility in art practice in America was being discussed by the art critic Lucy Lippard and friends as a 'diffused kind of process', alienated from the rationality sometimes associated with practices of male artists at that time.⁶⁶ As I suggested in the Introduction, in many instances, female artists were looking more towards the body for their imagery. They also saw the power struggles in the art world, and the difficulties of exhibiting in mainstream galleries as challenges that had to be met, in order to "move on to the other side, whatever that is."⁶⁷ To do so, it would seem that borders and margins of both the body and gallery space had to be addressed as sites of exchange; of blurring and breaching, messy and possibly disordered, as places where meaning collapses.⁶⁸ As a site of abjection, hair disturbs the body's boundaries, and Maher says of hair:

"But in such monumental quantities it's outside, wild, beyond the pale. In the margins, in the woods, outside, beyond our understanding, but for all that it grows right out of our own bodies."⁶⁹

Maher's words offer an understanding of hair through a notion of the primitive as something or somewhere that is separated from society, mainly through her repetition of the word 'out'. Warner suggests that excesses of hair in fairytales, for instance young runaway girls disguised as animals, "stood not for the rejection of sexuality but the condition of it."⁷⁰ In their shame at being contaminated and violated by a male figure (often their father), Warner describes the wearing of skins as enactments of penitence. This is analogous with saintly figures, such as Mary Magdalene whose long hair covers her naked body in Tilman Riemenschneider's limewood carving of

⁶⁶ The discussion here is informed by a five-way conversation in Lucy Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art*, (New York: E P Dutton, 1976), pp. 80-89.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Kristeva, (1982), p. 2.

⁶⁹ Barber, in Perry, (2004), p. 100.

⁷⁰ Warner, (1995), p. 358.

the saint.⁷¹ The dramatic effect of Maher's words can create an archaic fantasy as surely as the multi-layers of meaning within her visual imagery, drawing her reader into a sharp recognition of the body and the horrors associated with its immoderations. The culture of myths and legends is set apart from 'real' life, identifying with ideas of more primitive notions, for instance, of good and evil but rather than taking Maher's statements as autobiographical they can provide an impetus for creative narration, for instance, storytelling.

The scale of Maher's works mirror excesses of both hair and storytelling; that is to say, they are both scaled up and scaled down (*Keep* is 2.7m high, *Familiar I* is 2.5m² while *House of Thorns* (1995) [Figure 2.8], is only 15cm high). These excesses of size have connotations to the 'little people' (leprechauns) and giants such as Fionn mac Cumhaill, and can be traced to Irish mythology. While drawing on aspects of Irish culture including folk tales and medieval imagery, Maher's work enables nuances of primitivism, but simultaneously challenges these through her ironic representations of the specifically 'primitive' aspects.⁷² She submits that re-enacting a 'primitive' Irishness to identify with 'other' rather than the norm can be empowering, although Barber, for one, suggests it may hold the potential for stereotyping.⁷³

Keep and *Familiar I* both evoke the long blonde hair of Rapunzel and Melisande, but even in fairytales, hair reveals its contradictions and complexities. Where Rapunzel uses her hair to escape her entrapment and create a different life, Melisande's hair is

⁷¹ I mention this sculpture in the Introduction.

⁷² I use the term primitive here in the sense of evolutionary and pre-cultural, with the proviso that it is relational to how Ireland and Irishness have been viewed during colonialism by England. Barber suggests that Maher's work can be understood as a performance of the primitive. See Barber, in Perry (2004), p. 102.

⁷³ Barber, in Perry, (2004), p. 102.

a story of excesses from baldness to over-abundance. Warner's reminder of the German proverb, "A woman's hair is stronger than a hempen rope,"⁷⁴ might seem to correspond to Maher's mediations on femininity (particularly as she uses a hempen rope in *Keep* as the internal core of the braids), although Warner references it in relation to her own exploration of bloneness. Kilfeather, however, explores connections between myths and fairytales and the rural materials Maher uses, for instance, in her unusual forms of dressmaking (such as in *Bee Dress* and *Berry Dress* (1994) and *Nettle Coat* (1995)). In doing so, she identifies it as a version of *écriture féminine*, a writing of the body, when she says:

"I think we all recognize what kind of feminism this is, with its emphasis on the performance or costuming of gender, and the imprisonment of the domestic, its revision of the liberationary as well as the policing potential of traditional narrative, its foregrounding of female labour."⁷⁵

Thus, the materials Maher uses including for instance, the hempen rope, opens up other imaginative and interpretative spaces. Allusions to the strength of hair has historically been associated with the male, for instance, in the Biblical story Samson reputedly lost his strength after Delilah cut his hair. Cixous's reading of strength, (and her argument refers primarily to the tumult of woman's drives), implies something of which women have been made to feel ashamed in a struggle that she claims has "for centuries been immobilised in the trembling equilibrium of a deadlock" between expectations of woman, and the lived experiences of women.⁷⁶ Not only have women been subsumed in patriarchal discourses, but, she suggests that women have also struggled with their internal balance, that is, a tentative stability

⁷⁴ Warner, (1995), p. 374.

⁷⁵ Kilfeather, in Deane and Mac Suibhne, (2006), p. 11. She refers to Hélène Cixous' use of the phrase *écriture féminine* to identify the importance for women of experience over language.

⁷⁶ Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', (Summer 1976), pp. 876-7.

between reality and their imaginations, (something already discussed in my exploration of *Folt*).

Perhaps the excesses which Maher references in her work might be seen to refer to musings on the balance that women attempt to achieve between perceived expectations of the female and 'her femininity'. This, to quote Cixous, is women's own "writing of femininity", in other words, writing herself, writing her body and writing 'woman'.⁷⁷ Through her 'writing' of myth and fairytale, Maher's works can be seen to actively re-connect with that which has been repressed in mainstream culture, yet is rich and inventive. Her use of hair restores a primacy to the body that once could only be identified through a notion of 'other'. The metaphor of hair in the flax, and its echoing of both modesty and liberation of the body, as well as reminders of fairytales, might all be seen as indicators of an *écriture féminine* to Maher's audience.

In *Andromeda* (2000) [Figure 2.9], Greek myth and the gargantuan provide a grammar for excesses of luxuriant feminine hair, snaking across a vast expanse of paper, blurring the boundary between the mythical princess and her tormentor the sea monster. Here the female body is represented as an immoderation of sensate imagery, where the horror of the immense coils and twists articulate layers of memory, and might remind us of Helen Chadwick's *Loop My Loop* (1991) [Figure 2.10].⁷⁸ Chadwick's plastic coils, however, entwined with Barbie doll hair, cross more blatantly between the inner and the outer body with kitsch and fetishistic

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Maher confirmed that Helen Chadwick's work has been influential on her own in a personal communication, (28 October 2009).

references to contemporary body horror beyond the erotic.⁷⁹ In *Andromeda*, the potency of the Medusan head severed from its body, and the iconographical references to extreme emotions, from sexual ecstasy and the bestial, to the unleashing of sorrow, question the dynamic margins of femininity, and the location of the female artist in a haunting depiction of historical myth. Maher's engagement with hair can be seen to exploit the activity of retelling myths and fairytales rather than recounting specific stories. Her deployment of natural materials in *House of Thorns* (1995), for instance, might be seen as referencing fairy stories such as 'Hansel and Gretel', or 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears'.⁸⁰ Other than in her titles, Maher makes no specific reference to particular stories, and so I would argue that her use of a generic child, rather than, for instance, one specifically named as Melisande, Rapunzel or Lorelei on the Rocks, indicates a more inclusive femininity, albeit one that has echoes of Young's collective body of femininity rather than one based around perceived notions of 'woman'.⁸¹

Maher's choice of materials appears to stem from her relationship with the Irish landscape, the female body, and from folklore and stories, and she has told us of her fascination with aspects of these that are beyond 'normal' controls.⁸² The wildness of the forest, for instance, in *Red Riding Hood*, is laden with meaning. Her titles have also been discussed by Barber, Kilfeather, and Ziff, as suggesting a multiplicity of readings of times and people of the past, for instance *Keep*, *Familiar* and *Folt*. She uses narratives and language that appear straightforward but their complications

⁷⁹ A point made by Rosemary Betterton, in *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and The Body*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 142-4.

⁸⁰ To quote Maher, "The whole history of the landscape is in that material itself...If you use something like rose thorns, you bring in the history of the hedges, their connection with the people, and the hundreds of stories and songs surrounding them". O'Regan, (1997), p. 43.

⁸¹ Young, (1994).

⁸² Barber, in Perry, (2004), p. 94.

obfuscate all our learned boundaries between the fantasy of the primeval and 'reality'. When Ruane calls attention to the role of the fairytale as culturally suspect, as relating to escapism and fantasy of pre-literate peoples, she suggests Maher's narratives could be problematic. Maher however describes her practices that range the borders between the cerebral and the primitive as opening, "a space into memory,"⁸³ It could be argued that gendered references in her use of fairytales, myths, hair and titles question representations of the female body as she raises questions about the many landscapes of Irishness.⁸⁴

The Girl-Child and Feminine Hair

The image of the girl-child is remarkable in its proliferation throughout Maher's oeuvre. She first appears in a series of drawings entitled *The Thicket* (1990) [Figure 2.11], as she is awakened to the world through the spaces of play, where knowledge is acquired and "where memory and dream begin to fuse together."⁸⁵ The miniature clothing of *Bee Dress* and *Berry Dress* (both 1994), and *Nettle Coat* (1995) and two years later *The Staircase of Thorns*, might have been created with her in mind. She again appears in *Talking to My Hair*, *Familiar 1*, *Familiar 4*, and *The Running Girl*, (all 1994), and moves elusively amongst the pages of the book *A Necklace of Tongues* (2001), as she is seen diving, standing high on mushrooms, throwing out a rope of sand from an upper window, and then, on the endpapers of the book, her writing seems to materialize through Maher's left hand.⁸⁶ She can also be seen as a waving girl in *The Axe (and the Waving Girl)* (2003), and a golden girl in *Orsola* (2006).

⁸³ Ruane, in O'Regan, (1997), p. 15.

⁸⁴ Barber, in Perry, (2004), p. 93.

⁸⁵ Barber, (1995), p. 15.

⁸⁶ Alice Maher, *A Necklace of Tongues*, (Ballybeg: Coracle Press, 2001).

Who is this girl-child? What is her importance in relation to Maher's strategies with hair? In order to find answers to these questions, it may first be useful to briefly explore the artistic context of Ireland in the 1980s. Fionna Barber has theorised Maher's relationship to European and American modernism and post-modernism, and many of the themes I explore are tied into this. Her earliest art works are discussed as negotiations of the more gestural painting associated with neo-Expressionism that was being taught in Irish Art Colleges during the 1980s. Barber sees in *The Visit* (1987) and *Celebration Robes* (1988), for instance, the emergence of Maher's critique of the conceptualization of 'woman' as the archaic muse for male-oriented systems, within both art and Catholicism.⁸⁷

Caught in a bind between the marginalization of women in patriarchal discourses and the appropriation of their identity by the male artist, Maher's development of a girl-child appears to both intellectualize and embody her position as 'woman'. Fintan Cullen suggests that Maher, together with Kathy Prendergast and Dorothy Cross (whose work I explore in Chapter Four), "offers a more confrontational approach in their focus on gender imagery."⁸⁸ It could be understood that an aspect of this might include or refer to challenges in the work of these artists, amongst others, to archetypal notions of 'woman'. There appears to be a language running through many of the representations of the girl-figure that is conceivably based around a lack of 'feminine' signs. Her torso often appears rigid and immobile, never fluid or shapely, while the head is alert, and the hair often held stiffly flame-shaped either above or behind the figure. This form is reminiscent of the wings, hair, capes and tails of the

⁸⁷ Surrealism has often been considered in this light, and Maher's work has been discussed in terms of its relationship with Surrealism.

⁸⁸ Fintan Cullen, 'The Visual Arts in Ireland', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed. by Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 304-21, p.316.

mythological creatures of fantasy or childhood, about to swoop on an unsuspecting victim or rescue a creature in distress. In other words, active and assertive states often associated with masculinity and the male gaze, rather than notions of 'woman' as object, and passive. In *The Thicket*, the girl-child's dark hair is wild, hanging over her face as she peers through it at the world, echoing the uncontrollability of nature, and youth. In the etching *Talking to my Hair* (1994) [Figure 2.12], however, Maher pursues an unusual strategy with hair. We see the side view of the girl-child bracing herself as she looks across the picture plane. Her hair is blown some distance straight in front of her, hiding her eyes, before it falls at a right angle to the ground, creating an almost rectilinear archway. The blank space created between the girl's dress and the hair opposite appears like a featureless face – the horizontal hair of the girl clarifies the top of this (suggestion of a) female head and falls down (what might be) her proper right cheek (at the left of the etching), while the girl's dress defines the proper left side of the chin. In this etching, Maher's representation of the girl-child's hair suggests development of the female child into a yet unmapped representation of adulthood, which at that moment is a faceless trace. This is reiterated in the discrepancy apparent between the size of the girl-child and the size of the 'ghost' head. The tresses of hair can be seen as a metonym for imagination or dreaming for its own sake, such as in childhood, which may or may not transform into what are perceived as more acceptable notions of femininity. Rosa Lee, among others, has explored what 'feminine' might mean in terms of post-modern masculinity. She suggested in 1987 that the post-modern male artist often explored the more feminine aspects of their psyche; not only was this seen as acceptable, it was also seen as "a virtual prerequisite for creativity."⁸⁹ Relating this notion to Maher's girl-child, who often appears intent on serious matters (often seen by the male as associated with

⁸⁹ Rosa Lee, 'Resisting Amnesia: Feminism, Painting and Postmodernism', *Feminist Review*, 26, (Spring 1987), 5-28 (p.8).

masculinity), Maher seems at pains to set the balance straight with perceived 'masculine' traits appearing in a female form. Do her representations of the girl-child suggest that to achieve the perceived socio-cultural expectations of the female artist and yet allow her individual inventiveness to flow as imagination, some part of 'femininity' must be relinquished? This recurring issue is evoked by the frequent conflict between the girl-child and the fairytales in which she dwells.

Parallel to this, and as a result of the issue of gender boundaries in artistic practices, is the question of reclamation of 'woman's time'. In 1998 Maher commented that the little girl could be read as "the liberation of the female imagination."⁹⁰ Turning again to Cixous, the girl-child might be seen as a metaphor for recovery of, or writing, 'woman' and the female artist. The girl-child who was first seen in *The Thicket* weighing and measuring the world can be seen as embodying more than 'femininity' rising from the ashes of childhood. She might also be an attempt to assimilate the world on what are perceived as more masculine terms, that is, through scientific reasoning and single-mindedness. The girl-child, however, appears as a tiny figure, contrasting with the implied physicality and metonymy of mythical representations of her as Ireland. It is almost as if Maher questions how such a diminutive image can achieve this task.

The depiction of the girl-child as a golden bronze in the installation *Orsola*, (2006) [Figure 2.13], might indicate her importance. During the exhibition of this work in Italy, Maher reminds us through the girl-child of shared Catholic connections. As a metaphor or symbolic statue of Ireland that has been imbued with socio-cultural significance, she can be seen to suggest the distance between notions of 'woman' and

⁹⁰ Ruane, in O'Regan, (1997), p. 14.

female embodiment. She is impossibly lifeless and static, only one remove from the phallic image of Maher's bronze and gold leaf *Shard* (2001) [Figure 2.14]. Although this golden *Shard* may hint at patriarchal veneration of male notions of 'woman' through its materials, its title suggests otherwise. While alluding to 'woman' as a splinter, such as Eve coming from Adam's rib (or as mentioned earlier Aphrodite from her father's foam), *Shard* might also suggest fragmentation of this very notion.

The tresses of the girl-child in *Orsola* are dense around her head, and unlike the living, breathing but somnolent artist performing in the installation. (Maher sometimes lay before the altar mirroring the pose of the golden figure, while at other times she is absent.) The hair of the bronze girl-child is smooth and restrained, while that of Maher lying on the opposite altar, flows freely. The former reminds us of the conventions of smooth Classical marble sculptures, where according to Johann Herder in the eighteenth-century, the smooth outline or flow of the form was seen as preferable to the touch, whereas unruliness and wilder traits of thick bushes were intolerable since that impeded form.⁹¹ As a metaphor for the female, Herder's gendered image of hair is soft and understated, yet reined in, controlled, subdued and compliant.

Although the female artist may 'pose' as the girl-child temporarily, she will always be flesh, and vulnerable, and the tangled branches in *Orsola* screening her performance from the observer reiterate the inherent chaos of life as well as the temporal and cultural distance between the two female figures. Here, the branches remind the observer of those in *The Thicket* [Figure 2.15], (an ink drawing from the *Orsola* exhibition catalogue), which also recalls Maher's early series of *Thicket* drawings

⁹¹ Herder, (2002), p. 55.

with their serious girls.⁹² The branches in *Orsola* are, like those in Maher's installation *Rood* (2005), hanging upside down out of kilter with nature. Cristin Leach implies domesticity when he calls them "twiggy curtains", but I would argue they could be more than that.⁹³ Branches are present throughout Maher's oeuvre. They feature in the titles of her works, for instance, *The Hedge of Experience* (1997), as well as in representations or metaphors of hair, or for the possibilities of what hair can be seen as, for instance, *Cell* (1991). In many ways, branches behave like hair and as such, have anthropomorphic associations. Herder called hair "a sacred grove" in the eighteenth-century, whereas Maher places hair "in the margins, in the woods."⁹⁴ In the natural world, hair/branches cover the body/tree, and are controlled by nature and natural instincts, shaped and pruned for optimum results, and to accede to socio-cultural mores. However, branches reach outwards for light to grow and expand in the same way the mind and body open themselves to knowledge and sensation. These branches might also be seen as reminders of the unkempt hair of Maher's serious girls, as a metaphor for flows between imaginative and rational spaces of the feminine. When Maher moves in and out of the *Orsola* installation, she might be seen as exploring these spaces, and I suggest that hair offers us a key with which to unlock some of these multiple layers of possible meanings.

Vittorio Urbani sees only a dialectics of presence and absence, and life and death, in both the marble and the peach tree branches, long dead after their journey from Ireland. He suggests that when Maher lies on the marble altar in *Orsola*, some of its coldness and hardness may 'seep' into her living body, "bringing with it the

⁹² Alice Maher, *Alice Maher – Orsola*, exh. cat. (Venice: Nuova Icona, (2006), p. 40.

⁹³ Cristin Leach, 'Art: Beauty and the Beech', *The Sunday Times*, (August 21, 2005).

⁹⁴ Herder, (2002), p. 66, and note 11, p.118.

melancholic attitude of death.”⁹⁵ Might it not also be possible that some of Maher’s vitality will enliven this traditional sculptural material that is synonymous with monuments and memorials, and particularly associated with religious discourses and environments? Maher’s work suggests it may be more imaginative to ask what it is the female artist can bring to the arts, not just what she might gain from them.

Flows, Streams, and Becomings

The final section of this chapter will attempt to draw together strands from the earlier sections subjecting them to a slightly different lens. This chapter has repeatedly revisited the notion that Maher can be seen as challenging the role and spaces of the female, and particularly those of the female artist. Returning to my opening quotation by Ailbhe Smyth; she finds she cannot get a ‘fix on identity’ in her deconstruction of the Dublin monument *Anna Livia Plurabele*. This public statue is a personification of the River Liffey flowing through the city in the form of a woman, and Smyth’s text verbalizes what the monument might mean to her audience, mainly the Irish people. *Anna Livia Plurabele*, otherwise known as ‘The Floozie in the Jacuzzi’, ‘The Skivvy in the Sink’ and many another alias, could be a three-dimensional representation of what Hilary Robinson describes as ‘woman’ in Irish culture. That is, a cipher of nation, produced conceptually through iconic representations of myth and religion.⁹⁶ It can be argued that traditionally, male-dominated systems of power have perpetuated an impracticably idealistic notion of ‘woman’, partly based on a romanticized purity associated with the Virgin Mary. ‘Woman’ has also been constrained by the cultural allegory of Ireland’s tradition of

⁹⁵ Maher, (2006), p. 7.

⁹⁶ As explored by Hilary Robinson, in ‘Disruptive Women Artists: An Irigarayan Reading of Irish Visual Culture’, *Irish Studies Review*, 8, 1, (2000), 57-72 (p. 57).

self-representation through the female form, as she functions as Mother to Ireland's sons.⁹⁷ These include the potent mythological figures of Queen Medb, Morrigan and *Sile na gCioch* from ancient Celtic literature.⁹⁸ Christianity's distaste for overt female sexuality during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries replaced these figures with Erin and Hibernia,⁹⁹ Dark Rosaleen¹⁰⁰, and Cathleen ni Houlihan (an allegory for Ireland as an old woman needing protection and also as a beautiful young virgin).¹⁰¹

Responding to this trope of Ireland as 'woman', the female artist and femininity generally has endeavoured to find her place within Irish culture. Is it surprising that Maher's girl-child appears so frozen in time? I suggest that Maher's representations of her question how it is possible for 'woman' to fulfil these functions and find a balance between the expectations placed on her, and her inner, imagined world. Much of Maher's work arguably evokes wider issues of embodiment and memories of being a child/woman. Her art practices with hair seem to substantiate the premise of this chapter that she challenges the traditional positioning of the female artist. Where Smyth uses language to excavate the identity of 'woman' and explode the myth of 'woman' as Ireland, I suggest that Maher's practices in which hair is both literally braided and bound, and also enabled through metaphors, creates flows and

⁹⁷ Adele Dalsimer and Vera Krielkamp, 'Re/Dressing Mother Ireland: Feminist Imagery in Art and Literature', in *Re/Dressing Cathleen: Contemporary Works from Irish Women Artists*, ed. by Jennifer Grinnell and Alison Conley, (Chestnut Hill, MA: McMullen Museum of Art, 1997), pp. 37-41 (p. 37).

⁹⁸ See James MacKillop, *Myths and Legends of the Celts*, (London: Penguin, 2005) pp. 69-70 for a discussion of all these mythological figures. *Sile na gCioch* anglicized as Sheela-na-gig has been variously related to pagan goddesses, warnings about sins of the flesh, and protectors against evil, and usually depicts squatting female figures.

⁹⁹ Hibernia and Erin are derivative of the Irish Gaelic, Éire, meaning Ireland. See also Hilary Robinson, 'Irish/Woman/Artwork: Selective Readings', *Feminist Review*, 50, (Summer 1995), 89-110 (pp.106-107).

¹⁰⁰ Dark Rosaleen or Róisín Dubh, a pseudonym for Ireland, written between the 16th- 19th centuries, is a political song based on an earlier love song. Singing such songs sustained patriotic expression. <<http://www.irishpage.com/songs/roisdubh.htm>> [accessed 24 June 2007]

¹⁰¹ Cathleen ni Houlihan was famously used as a literary figure in William Butler Yeats's play of the same name. See George Cusack, 'Cathleen ni Houlihan', *The Literary Encyclopaedia*, (The Literary Dictionary Company, 25 November 2004), <<http://www.litencyc.com>> [accessed 1 July 2007]

possibilities in her challenge to relocate the female artist, and as part of that, 'woman'.

According to Deleuze and Guattari's complex, and often confusing, philosophical theories, 'flows' occur to every embodied being; flows of the body, mind and senses. They contend that every flow is produced by a bodily organ, for instance, the eye, a breast, emotions, and which they term 'flow-producing 'machines'.'¹⁰² They propose: "Every object presupposes the continuity of a flow; every flow, the fragmentation of the object."¹⁰³ I interpret this as suggesting that every embodied action, sensation, or thought (that is every flow), makes a connection or connections and in doing so fragments and then re-starts in other flows of thoughts, sensations and physical processes. When this occurs as embodied experiences and events, then Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical concept can be understood in the less abstract realm of lived experiences. If the body is seen as a machine or plurality of machines, then processes associated with the body (and mind) offer us tangible examples to understand. For instance, the eye interprets every other machine and flow in terms of what and how it sees. When the eye 'machine' looks at an artwork, for instance *Keep*, it is interrupted by another machine when its audience moves through the braids of hair (such as touch, repugnance, a shiver), and other connections are created in the desiring flow between these in moments of stasis.

If Smyth's text seeks to deconstruct 'woman' as Ireland through concrete imagery, then it might be argued that Maher's art practices with hair as personifications or metaphors of femininity, challenge the traditional role of the female artist. By approaching her work through a concept of flows, I tentatively suggest that she

¹⁰² Deleuze and Guattari, (2004a), p. 6.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

appeals to ideologies of 'woman' as a construct, and tangibly challenges these.

Maher seems to anticipate this to some extent in her statement, "all ideas flow back and forth until they are distilled to an essence and then reborn in a new configuration."¹⁰⁴ She discloses her interest in the concept of flow through its association with memory, and Ireland's, "cultural approach to tears and the continuous flow of weeping."¹⁰⁵ This flow of tears might be seen in her aesthetic practice to relate to laborious processes, to accumulating (including her work with hair), her interest in repetition, for instance, chain mail and patterns found in nature, and temporal exchange in movement back and forth through time; all serial operations. But, connections might also be found through sensations, and this raises issues of externalisation (of actions associated with sensations), and internalisation (of sensations as feelings and emotions). For instance, Maher makes the following statement: "You're crying, leaking salt water, because something emotionally complex has happened. And it's the point at which this flow happens that I'm interested in."¹⁰⁶ The only visual evidence of tears is in their actions when they flow. Arising as a result of emotional sensations they pass from non-existence into being, yet conversely, from a liquid form to a state of fragmentation.

When hair is cut or pulled out, fragmentation occurs literally to the dynamic connections in the hair shaft, or between the hair shaft and the hair follicle, or between the blood vessels at the base of the hair follicle and the head, and a different flow occurs in both the remaining hair flow on the head, and also in the disconnected flow of hair or detritus lost. In relation to each stage of the creation and

¹⁰⁴ Alice Maher's address to the inaugural Council of National Cultural Institutions (CNCI) Seminar, "Culture Matters", Dublin (3 April 2007). <http://www.cnci.ie/CM_07/alice_maher.html> [accessed 20 March 2009]

¹⁰⁵ Barber, in Perry, (2004), pp. 98-9.

¹⁰⁶ Barber, in Perry, (2004), p. 99.

production of an art work, for example, *Keep*, flows as active machines, may produce innumerable connections. First we may imagine a lengthy spell of actions; connections with collecting 'machines', travelling 'machines', storing/hoarding 'machines', and sorting 'machines'. Running concurrent with these are other parts of the artist's life, including her abstract thoughts, questions, and ideas, until and during active producing or braiding 'machines' make new connections. Within these may be other layers of flows; to do with the cities of Belfast and Cork and also concerning issues of femininity and masculinity in the materials of hair and steel, and the flows which occur in the friction of steel on hair when the two materials are placed together. All these connections have flows of energy whereby new correspondences may occur, which are also assimilated into, but differentiate, those flows between 'machines'. Each connection or flow produces something else; each flow is a 'becoming' in itself. In physical terms, the artwork moves from collecting for its own sake, through the laborious process of making, to completion. During this time, more conceptual aspects or flows may have fragmented and dissolved into memory to be un/retrievable matter.

When Maher bound the braids of hair in *Keep* to the top and bottom of the steel cylindrical frame, exclusionary spaces were created inside and outside the hair tower, although because of the nature of the material – hair – delineation remains unfixed and mobile. Ireland's recent troubled history has a residue of reminders of conflicting religious factions, of strangers entwined together whose lives may never coincide. This piece could be seen to bind some of these histories together publicly but anonymously through physical flows of hair, and intellectually through the plurality of abstract connections and interpretations made of her work. *Keep* also hints at the unsavouriness of the unknown, of contamination, of edges of anonymity

touching and entwining together that remind us of Kristeva's concept of the abject. The only evidence of the audience moving in and out of the tower of hair occurs in the fragmentation of the braids visible in the detritus of hairs on the floor, and this disconnected hair can be seen as a site of abjection; it is doubly abjected. As such, I suggest that the flows that effected this enable additional layers of interpretation, including a notion of subverting the boundaries of the work itself. In these ways, definitions of the artwork through its physical borders or boundaries (of braids on a steel frame) is compromised and challenged. Through numerous flows, the liminal material on the gallery floor becomes the work itself, and the installational form of *Keep* becomes a site of loss. Thus it can be argued that boundaries and distinctions between the artwork and its losses become confused; the nature and properties of hair being instrumental to this.

Conclusion

Maher's serial strategies with hair can be seen as enabling firstly, new ways of understanding how perceptions of 'woman' and artist can be challenged, and secondly, how her desire to extend meaning can occur. I suggest both these points might be enabled by her audience and critics delving into layers of memory, of myth and fairytale, by examining statements, by considering biographical details, by articulating artistic processes, and by digesting critical interpretations to retrieve abstract conceptions underlying aesthetic experiences. If these processes describe some of the actions or functions of an audience or viewer to an artwork, then it might be argued that Maher's audience is of considerable significance to her strategies to further her subtle yet tenacious aesthetic challenge to the traditional positioning of the female artist. Intellectually, the physical processes of desiring

flows and connections of the various 'machines' that create the work continue for as long as the work has an audience in the gallery, or on the written page in the form of critical writing, or in oral discussions of the works. It could be at this point that some of these flows and becomings might founder, but here I argue that Maher consciously encourages them, notes them, and makes statements about them to keep in motion this process of an 'intellectualizing machine'. Dynamic flows and becomings will only have an end when interpretations cease.

Adrian Parr describes the Deleuzian concept of flows or becomings as encounters that aspire to bring together "a variety of elements and forces into relation with one another."¹⁰⁷ Through her use of titles, imagery and working processes, Maher's strategies with hair have been shown to open up multiple readings of her work. These include the serial strategies she uses in various ways to test preconceptions of the female artist and 'woman'. Far from being a retrospective act, autobiographical references in her work *become* living narratives through flows and streams created within our continuing experiences. As John Paul Eakin says, "self-invention refers not only to the creation of self in autobiography but also to the idea that the self/identity or selves/identities they seek to reconstruct in art are not given but made in the course of human development."¹⁰⁸ Maher's recourse to biographical memories and stories of herself as an embodied being can be seen to provide a series of reciprocal exchanges that have their roots in fragments of memory but are located in contemporary art. Serial strategies in her art practice enable an artistic framing of hair that allows her to explore various concepts of 'woman' as she exposes her positioning as a female artist. I suggest that Maher critiques male bastions of art

¹⁰⁷ Adrian Parr, *The Deleuze Dictionary*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 26.

¹⁰⁸ Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 8.

practice, by denying that strength and permanence are omnipotent, in favour of impermanence, the body and, implicitly, 'woman'.

Chapter 3

Binding, Stitching, Trauma and the Haptic Thread: Annegret Soltau

Introduction

"The line for me is like a hair...I can feel the hair...Hair became a symbol of being present. Hair can be a prison and also protect you."¹

"It is precisely in the breached boundaries of the skin in such imagery that memory continues to be felt as a wound rather than seen as contained other"²

So far, this thesis has explored hair as an embodied material onto which metaphors of the life cycle, memory, trauma and fluid conceptions of identity (specifically 'woman') can be mapped. In this chapter I will explore another reading of hair that also draws on these themes, but in which it mutates into various aspects of line. Annegret Soltau (b. 1946-) has deployed hair and the body in her art practices (including drawings, etchings, performances and installations) over the last thirty-five years, and I concentrate here on a selection of works mainly from the 1970s and 1990s. I will demonstrate that Soltau consciously developed her use of line from two-dimensionality in her early drawings and etchings of hair as she strived to make the visual evoke a notion of tactility, to a more three-dimensional model in her performances. I will show how the actual threads used in these performances allow a notion of the haptic that includes both the tactile and a visible reminder of this (in the traces of the threads left on the skin). These early explorations of touch and its associations will be shown as central to Soltau's quest to find a haptic trace of the body in her later photo-stitchings and photo-sequences, and also explored in relation

¹ Annegret Soltau in an interview at her studio in Germany with the author on 14 September 2009, found in Appendix 2. Questions were asked in English, and these and Soltau's answers translated as necessary by Heidi Weitzel who was also present. The interview was also tape-recorded, and transcribed then translated into English by Ruth Spurgeon to verify the accuracy of the translation and transcription during the interview.

² Bennett, (2005), pp. 41-2.

to a notion of seriality.³ The methods and processes of her artistic practice of working with the body and its representations will also be examined in connection to haptic spaces.⁴ The chapter will analyze some of the ways in which Soltau's work appears repeatedly to explore feminine identity, as she uses hair and thread to evoke discrepancies between the inner and the outer body, and also phases in the human life cycle, through issues of trauma, isolation and connection.

Since 1975, Soltau mainly has used photographs of herself and her close family, and as such her work could be considered as being engaged with the personal, with intimate private histories. However, as I argue, her engagement with the body, and in particular the head, can be seen as evoking more political interpretations. Her oeuvre includes etching, performance and video, although the main body of her work has for some years been concerned with photographic images. She exhibits these in formats ranging from single mounted frames to large wall installations of several hundred individual images. Her recourse to hair and its simulacra in threads and cobwebs will be shown to offer many literal and metaphorical levels of meaning to the viewer, as she continuously uses her work to highlight the vulnerability of identity to dislocation and metamorphosis.

Annegret Soltau's position in German cultural history is one of increasing importance to a younger generation of artists and art historians in their search for connections to, and understandings of, earlier waves of feminist work including that

³ I use haptic in this chapter in relation to the sense of touch; as an etched trace, a stitched thread, and for its tactile potential. Beyond this simple definition, and drawing on a Deleuzian reading of affect, is a sense whereby the haptic, through sensations connected to touch, enables or stimulates an affective response.

⁴ These explorations and ideas are informed by, but not reducible to, Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of haptic spaces. Deleuze and Guattari, (2004b).

of early performance art.⁵ She studied painting and graphics in Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg (College of Fine Arts) between 1967-72, followed by a year at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, before receiving a DAAD scholarship to Milan.⁶ Her work from the 1970s reveals two concerns prevalent at that time in the work of many women artists; the female body and a theme, which I tentatively borrow from Rozsika Parker's book of the same name, the 'subversive stitch'.⁷ By this I refer to Soltau's use of the traditional tools of needle and thread used for stitching, a central task for countless women across the 'Western' world, and globally, up to at least the twentieth century. The 2007 exhibition in Los Angeles entitled *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution* represented several North American, South American and European women artists, including Faith Wilding (1943-), Eva Hesse (1936-70), Lygia Clark (1920-88), Anna Maria Maiolino (1942-), and Cecilia Vicuña (1948), as well as Soltau. I have singled out these particular artists, because between the late 1960s and early 1970s and despite their geographical and cultural separation, all these women were using threads in various ways in relation to dialogues or issues arising from or about the female body.⁸ Soltau's practices with thread, like that of many of her contemporaries, can be seen to challenge representational and cultural expectations of norms of traditional 'needlework', and Karin Struck has suggested that Soltau's work is more evocative of surgical stitching than feminine embroidery.⁹ This chapter will investigate the imaginative strategies in Soltau's serial use of the 'line' in hair and thread, as she draws, etches and sews, and the various ways her works appear to deconstruct,

⁵ Abigail Solomon-Godeau dates the first wave of feminism from the late 1960s to the end of the 1970s in 'The Woman Who Never Was: Self-Representation, Photography, and First-Wave Feminist Art', in Mark, (2007), pp. 336-345.

⁶ DAAD – *Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst*, (German Academic Exchange Service), is Germany's largest scholarship awards service.

⁷ Parker, (1984).

⁸ Mark, (2007).

⁹ "Dabei hat Vernähung weniger etwas Weibliches als etwas Chirurgisches." In *Annegret Soltau - Ich Selbst*, exh. cat. ed. by Kathrin Schmidt, (Darmstadt: Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt, 2006), p. 10.

redraw and bind the female head and body, through this notion of a 'subversive stitch'. In other words, Soltau, just as Rijkeboer with spinning, felting and knitting, views the process of sewing as a means to an end, rather than a distinctive 'feminine' skill.

Almost all the literature on Soltau's work, including exhibition catalogues and interviews, is in German. Where possible I have read English texts of these, and for the remainder I have used the services of a translator. Personal interviews with the artist have been partly in English and partly translated German, and will be used as primary source material for this chapter.¹⁰ Discrepancies of understanding between the artist's words and my interpretation could even be seen as congruous with Soltau's approach to her photo-stitchings. She says; "the discrepancy between what I gather together and what is not quite, is the important part for me," suggesting her awareness if not expectation of imperfections, of mismatching and variance.¹¹ Just as the photo-fragments she stitches together cannot be perfectly aligned, neither can the translated texts.

Two points have arisen from reading the German literature on the artist's work. Many of the critics of her work incline more towards the philosophical than the art historical. They often broadly consider the developmental stages of her work, and almost always reference the importance of her pregnancies to her work, but not her work made immediately before her first pregnancy or the pieces that draw on events such as the Chernobyl and 9/11 disasters. This chapter intends to redress this to some extent by exploring the work from 1976-7 as well as Soltau's response to world

¹⁰ The quality of translation of many web-based articles of exhibition reviews and brief media articles about Soltau's work is of a variable standard.

¹¹ Appendix 2.

events. To omit either her development of the line, or life stages, would be to do Soltau's oeuvre a disservice, yet the late 1970s when she considered becoming pregnant for the first time, was a phase in her artistic career that gave her great cause for concern and forced her to question herself as an artist and woman. As she says, "I had a fear of losing the artistic life. I knew too many biographies of women artists who couldn't continue."¹² During the last thirty-five years, her direct engagement with the questions she raised during 1977 has been central to her work and its theorization, especially her concern with the physicality of the self.

The chapter will begin by locating Soltau's artistic career within a post-war European and German context, and briefly discuss biographical details that suggest the importance of the female body, hair and stitching in her work. This will be followed by an examination of three key inter-related issues and their significance to female experiences and states of the human body, which I will suggest are apparent in her art practice. These are the haptic body, her serial use of hair and line, and trauma and the self.

German Context

Annegret Soltau is one of a number of female artists born in the 1930s and 1940s in Germany whose work can be seen to explore similar feminist issues. These include Mary Bauermeister (1934-), Isa Genzken (1948-), Rebecca Horn (1944-), and Ursula Reuter Christiansen (1943-), whose art practices during the 1960s and 1970s have used various motifs or themes also visible in Soltau's work. Bauermeister lives and works in Frankfurt-am-Main, less than 40km from Soltau's studio, and Genzken and

¹² Appendix 2.

Horn trained at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg; Genzken was a contemporary of Soltau, and Horn attended several years earlier.

Bauermeister began working with linen and other fabrics in sculptural installations, and during the 1970s added needle and threads to her works. Corinna Peipon suggests that in a series of works from 1963–4 titled *Needless Needles*, Bauermeister's work: "anticipates a set of artistic concerns relating to the construction of identity through memory and the notion of 'women's work'."¹³ Genzken's works might be seen to extend an abstract sculptural language into a more socially positioned discourse. As Buchloh says of it: "the body inscribed in Genzken's sculpture is the female body in opposition to the governing principles of the patriarchal body ruling the laws of sculpture."¹⁴ Horn's inter-disciplinary practice includes sculpture, performance, installation and film. Around 1968 she became interested in the vulnerability of the body, explored in her work through processes of constriction and isolation, and began a series of body-extension sculptures. Her *Bleistiftmaske (Pencil Mask)*, (1972), for example, comprises a fabric cage with pencils attached, which she wears over her head.¹⁵ After studying at Marburg and Dusseldorf, Reuter Christiansen moved to Denmark and became involved in the Red Stockings feminist movement, which began during 1968 in The United States, and was dedicated to uniting women in their struggle to win freedom from the oppression of men. Amongst other things, this group wrote manifestos, articles, newsletters and journals, they advised on organizing local groups, collaborated on child support and education, and by 1970 many of their texts were

¹³ Mark, (2007), p. 216.

¹⁴ Buchloh quoted by Corinna Peipon in Mark, (2007), p. 239. Original text by Buchloh unavailable.

¹⁵ Horn used this to create wall drawings by moving her head from side to side. See Mark (2007), p. 247. See also <<http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/bleistiftmaske/>> [accessed 23 July 2010]

reprinted in mass-market books around the world.¹⁶ Reuter Christiansen's film *The Executioner* (1972) combines autobiography and mythology into a universal female experience where, as the main character, the artist comes to terms with her loss of freedom at the imminent birth of her second child. She attempts to balance this with her respect for the power of women's connection to nature.¹⁷ The small overlaps in the contemporaneous work of these artists provide a contextual insight into the types of women's art practices that were developing concerns in Germany when Soltau began her career, namely the languages of sewing, exploration of the female body including its vulnerability, and questions of maintaining an artistic identity after childbirth.

From an interview with Soltau in 2009, it has been possible to compose a small register of artists who she cites as being influential to her work. This includes Leni Riefenstahl (1902-2003), Gerhard Richter (1932-), Ulrike Rosenbach (1943-) and Valie Export (1940-). Riefenstahl gained admiration for her film direction, particularly for her documentaries, although not for her connections to the Nazis.¹⁸ After turning to photography in the mid 1960s she documented the life of the Nuba tribes in Sudan. As Soltau explains of Riefenstahl, when discussing her own performances with threads, "She was very active and famous because of these photographs and films, and the stitching around the eyes in *Selbst* refers to images she made of the Nubas with their painted faces."¹⁹ One particular aspect of Soltau's

¹⁶ 'Redstockings', <<http://www.redstockings.org>> [accessed 1 August 2011]

¹⁷ Mark, (2007), p. 286.

¹⁸ Riefenstahl's films include *Triumph des Willens*, named after the Reich Party Congress 1934 in Nuremberg, and her 1937 two-part film about the Olympic games, *Fest der Völker*, and *Fest der Schönheit*. <<http://www.leni-riefenstahl.de/eng/bio.html>> [accessed 30 September 2009] There are also several biographical studies on the subject including Leni Riefenstahl, *Leni Riefenstahl's Africa*, trans. by Katherine Talbot, (London: Collins, 1982), and Leni Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time: The Memoirs of Leni Riefenstahl*, (London: Quartet, 1992), Steven Bach, *The Life and Times of Leni Riefenstahl*, (London: Little Brown, 2007).

¹⁹ Appendix 2.

later artistic career might be seen to echo Riefenstahl's experiences, although to a much lesser extent, and within a different historical context. Soltau also experienced censorship, not through her political associations as in Riefenstahl's case, but of her *Generative series* (1994-2005).²⁰ These works comprise photographs of her mother, grandmother, self, and daughter, torn and re-assembled as photo-stitchings of generationally mixed female bodies. The marrying of fragments of the younger and older female bodies seems to have incited this criticism. In this series even the youngest female body is no longer nubile; showing signs of ageing as she incorporates the body of her great grandmother.

Three men, who used their positions of power in curatorial and media terms to provoke heated debate, denounced the work as shocking and repulsive, and which resulted in its removal from two exhibitions. Responses to the censorship of *Generative* culminated in a roundtable enquiry, published in a 60-page document by Darmstadt Town Council (Soltau's home town). Forum members included a curator, and philosophy, psychology, art history and cultural anthropology academics, together with an audience, and the excluded works were on show for the duration of the debate. In the foreword to the main discussion, Soltau explains the two occasions of censure, which also led to a further exclusion of a photo-essay of her work by Farideh Akashe-Böhme by a Frankfurt publisher.²¹

²⁰ See Figure 3.1 for one work from this series.

²¹ Peter Benz, and others, *Ausgrenzung der Frauen in der Kunst am Beispiel Annegret Soltau*, (Darmstadt: Magistrat der Stadt, 1997). Sociologist Farideh Akashe-Böhme (1951-2008) wrote mainly on themes of women, their bodies and migration. See also Appendix 2. Soltau also details five public events/discussions/meetings, 39 newspaper and television broadcasts, 30 magazine and journal articles and eight catalogues and scientific works which have been generated as a result of the *Generativ series*, see Benz, (1997), pp. 57-9.

In the summer of 1994, the Mayor of Dietzenbach (a small town on the outskirts of Frankfurt), had Soltau's *Generative: mit Tochter, Mutter und Grossmutter* (1994) removed from the travelling exhibition *Ästhetik im Alter* (*Aesthetics in Old Age*). He reasoned that the inclusion of a naked old female body in the photo-stitching offended the moral ideas of visitors, in particular traditional Muslim groups, and called it "a load of filth".²² In Augsburg (Bavaria) a county councillor removed the work shortly before the opening of the same exhibition, considering it to be shocking and not aesthetic. During the summer of 1995 a Frankfurt publisher decided to remove four photographs from Akashe-Böhme's picture essay *Altern und Gestaltwandel der Frau: Ein Bildessay – Annegret Soltau* (*Ageing and the Changing Shape of Women: A Picture Essay – Annegret Soltau*). He claimed this was because of, "a consciously pursued aesthetic of the ugly that exceeded his range of tolerance."²³ Soltau also revealed during the forum that she had just been given an anonymous letter that had been sent to Hamburg Museum of Art and Crafts, where it was withheld during the exhibition to protect her.²⁴ Later in this chapter I will draw on the discussions following Soltau's statement in my exploration of *Generativ*.

Soltau also names Gerhard Richter's work as having a direct influence on her, possibly for his experimental approach to painting during the 1960s, but specifically that his work, like hers in the early 1970s, was referencing the contemporaneous extreme left-wing group, Baader Meinhof. Soltau exhibited at *Documenta VII* in Kassel in 1982 when Richter also exhibited and won the Arnold Bode prize, and was

²² "Es wurde von, 'Sauerei', geredet." Benz, (1997), p. 17.

²³ Die Begründung des Verlegers lautete, die bewusst verfolgte Ästhetik des Hässlichen fände nicht seine Toleranz. Benz, (1997), p. 17.

²⁴ The letter read: "Entartete Kunst. Offensichtlich einem kranken Hirn entsprungen." This translates literally as "Degenerate art. Apparently out of a sick mind." The term 'Entartete' was adopted by the Nazi regime to describe modern art, which was banned for being 'un-German'. Artists who pursued this type of work were subject to sanctions.

“impressed by his large archive collection of very personal photographs and documents.”²⁵ She also describes both Rosenbach and Export’s art practices as “contextual references for my performances.”²⁶ Rosenbach is well known for her innovative use of video, for instance, in *Einwicklung mit Julia* (*Winding with Julia*) (1972), Rosenbach binds her daughter to herself, to a soundtrack of adhesive tape being harshly pulled from a roll. Export’s performances during the late 1960s including *Touch Cinema* (1968) and *Genital Panic* (1969) (discussed earlier) challenge what she perceives as exploitation of the female body, a topic Soltau later explored in connection with her pregnancies. It might be concluded that these ‘influences’ stimulated Soltau to explore what might be seen as more experimental ways of considering and representing various physical and emotional stages in the life cycle of the female body.

Brought up by her grandmother on a farm in a small community near Luneburg, in northern Germany, Soltau learned to sew animal intestines for casings (for sausages or puddings) amongst other tasks.²⁷ Between the ages of sixteen and twenty she then worked at numerous jobs, including assisting a doctor during emergency operations at the docks in Hamburg. Through these initiatives she was able to move away and support herself during her training in Hamburg, and later Vienna and Milan.²⁸ From this brief glimpse of her early life, this chapter will show that the physicality of the

²⁵ Appendix 2.

²⁶ Appendix 2.

²⁷ Luneburg is part of the larger City State of Hamburg, which became a Free and Hanseatic City during the thirteenth century. Hanseatic comes from the term *hanse* for merchant guild. During the nineteenth century Hamburg officially became a sovereign City State within the wider German Confederation of States. After the Second World War, its boundaries were extended to incorporate surrounding towns and lands. I include this information to highlight a parallel between the history of the area, whereby Hamburg has fluctuated from being inside to being outside its ‘mother’ country, and the ways Soltau’s needle moves from the front to the reverse face of the photographic representations of the body as a whole. The importance of interchange or exchange between the two can be argued as a consistent theme in her work. Since Soltau was brought up in a non-traditional family setting, there might also be echoes of inside and outside ‘society’.

²⁸ Appendix 2.

body as flesh, informed by the sewing practices carried out on the farm and in the surgery, maintains an importance throughout her work, and might be seen to be referenced in the haptic threads. I investigate these points through a series of artworks drawn from various stages in Soltau's career, including the early etchings *Umschlossene (Enclosed)* (1973), *Umschlossener Kopf (Enclosed Head)* (1974), and her first performative work with threads *Selbst (Self)* (1975), and the associated performances *Demonstration* of 1976. *Meine Verlorenen Haare* (1977), *Ich, Bedrückt (I, Depressed)*, (1977-8), and the installation *Eingesponnene Schaufensterpuppe (Wrapped Mannequin)* (1978) will also be explored in relation to her responses to pregnancy and trauma of the body. Finally, later pieces in which Soltau again explores the wounded body with reference to ageing and world events include work from her series *Generativ* (1994-2005), *Mutter-Glück: Nach Chernobyl (Mother-Joy: After Chernobyl)* (1990), and *NY Faces- chirurgische Operationen XIV (NY Faces-Surgical Operation XIV)* (2001-2).

A Haptic Thread

Annegret Soltau has made clear that for her an association with the haptic is crucial to her work.²⁹ The Oxford Dictionary of Psychology describes this term as a form of touch involving active exploration.³⁰ I explore this concept both in relation to Soltau's performances and her two-dimensional works. Soltau explores surface in her early pieces through the processes of etching. Kathrin Schmidt, for example, draws a distinction between a line etched into a plate as seemingly tangible,

²⁹ Appendix 2.

³⁰ 'haptic touch n.' *A Dictionary of Psychology*, ed. by Andrew M. Colman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009).

<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t87.e3681>> [accessed 13 November 2009]

something that can be felt with the fingertip or nail, and a drawn line, which cannot be felt.³¹ Soltau's figures incised on the etching plate therefore allow her to literally 'feel' them, to trace the tactility of the human form. The process allows the work to be 'read' in both visual and tactile terms. Once a print is made from the etching, the line is no longer tactile, and the image is primarily visual. Understandably, the possibility of 'feeling' the figures may hold more importance to the artist than to her audience since the latter usually view etchings in spaces where circumstances restrict interaction to sight alone. For the viewer, therefore, it is more likely to be the ways texture and use of line are represented within the etching that gives form to the imagery that may suggest a material or physical presence. To be able to experience such a visual image through a notion of the haptic suggests that when the senses of sight and touch produce sensations that collide – visual and tactile – an affective response may be produced. When Soltau uses threads in her performative pieces, a haptic experience is more readily available to participants and audience through actual experiences of 'touch' that do not rely on the visual to provide a connection. Although Soltau has not mentioned this in any of her statements, I suggest that the scopic sense, that is the pleasure associated with sight, the visual and looking, can lose something of its primacy to a haptic experience that incorporates physical touch and feeling as sensations, for instance, when line becomes a haptic trace of drawing such as in Soltau's works which use actual thread, hair, or cobwebs.³²

³¹ "Im Gegensatz zur Zeichnung kann sie die Linien in die Kupferplatte eingraben, die beim Kontrollieren mit dem Fingernagel auf dem Metall spürbar und scheinbar greifbar wird." Schmidt, (2006), pp. 26-7.

³² This notion of a haptic visuality has been inspired by Catherine Dormor's article 'Skin:Textile:Film', *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture*, 6, 3, (November 2008), 238-253. She explains the scopic traditionally held more importance than the haptic, and attempts to redress this in relation to the tactile nature of textiles used by artist Ann Hamilton. See also Laura Mulvey 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16, 3, (Spring 1973), 6-18, who introduces the reader to various types of looking, including the scopic, in terms of gender. Haptic visuality is also something that could be argued as occurring in some of Valie Export's early performances.

The imagery of the female head in *Umschlossene (Enclosed)* (1973) [Figure 3.2], might be read as an early indication of Soltau's exploration of an evocation of the haptic. She uses both lead and coloured pencils to produce a female face with eyes and mouth closed, hair drawn severely to the side, and a close fitting material around the back of the head as neither hat nor second denser layer of hair. Below and around the chin a deep collar almost mirrors this shape to suggest a natural form, either breaking open or just closing, with the face appearing between the two as a central kernel or unblinking eye. Closed eyes and a pallid face give no hint as to whether the umbilical binding cocoons the female as if to evoke in the viewer a sense of physical restraint, or suggest gradual emergence from the tubular casing. Through their varying intensity Soltau's fine, hair-like series of pencil lines are also suggestive of the development of form. Although visual, this form emerges from the paper in such a way as to generate a haptic sense of the body through the implied proximity of the bindings to the skin.

Umschlossener Kopf (Enclosed Head) (1974) [Figure 3.3], also depicts a female head, with hair wrapping the neck, chin and mouth leaving only the closed eyes and nose showing. Schmidt suggests this opens up the possibility for Soltau of getting closer to the haptic thread, that is, of inviting touch.³³ I suggest rather that both hair and hair in representation becomes the haptic thread, because as an embodied material it reminds us doubly of the body; the body (in the form of hair) wraps itself. The tactile qualities of hair can be as significant as its visual impact, and leads us to ask if tangible visuality can occur when we see the world as if we were touching it, through the memory of touch. In another etching from around that time, *Verletzung (Injury)* (1974) [Figure 3.4], the injury referred to in the title is depicted as a crazed

³³ "Die Technik der Radierung eröffnet Soltau dabei die Möglichkeit, dem haptischen Faden näher zu kommen." Schmidt, (2006), p. 26.

web of hairs invading and literally de-facing the forehead of the woman. These lines, threads or hair, are drawn outwards beyond the edge of the etching, indicating a haptic tension as the female head appears to be unraveling. The intact eyebrow appears as a series of sutures, suggesting traces of earlier wounds. Apart from references to the physical and emotional pain of disfigurement, these lesions, like faults in marble, also evoke processes of ageing and experience.

Soltau says she moved away from the graphic arts of etching and drawing because, “I wanted the ‘drawing’ to be felt by the person, to make physical what I try to show in my pictures.”³⁴ Evidence of the haptic in Soltau’s etchings is bound into the concept of the process (the etched line that the finger traces on the plate), whereas in her performances, the body is central to the action and actually ‘feels’ the thread. In her performance *Selbst, (Self)* (1975-6) [Figure 3.5], she wrapped her head with black thread, literally drawing the haptic lines on her own body. Both the performance and its documentation happened ‘live’ and almost synchronously.³⁵ *Selbst 10* (1975) [Figure 3.6], is a two-dimensional frame from the documentation of the performance into which she has subtly stitched over some of the actual threads that were wrapped round her face, making it difficult to distinguish between the time phases. Where the threads of the ‘live’ performance and its documentation can no longer be felt or touched, those produced as representations after the event can. Soltau’s exploration of different evocations of the haptic can now be seen to suggest

³⁴ Appendix 2.

³⁵ A performance can never be revisited or re-performed exactly, and its once active presence as such is lost. Photographic documentation may retain certain chosen moments and details of it as reminders for the artist and her audience. For the viewer who did not attend the performance, its documentation might be seen to constrain the events into the formal qualities of a photograph, and in doing so, create tensions between the various temporalities associated with the event; the performance itself, its documentation, and subsequently every instance of viewing the documentation. This raises issues of both an absent presence, and also of the instability of memory and its part in interpretation. See Schmidt, (2006), pp. 18-19, also Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections of Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, (London: Vintage, 2000)

firstly a complex layering of time, and secondly an intricate fusion of the body, trauma and memory that has developed in her work from hair and line. The artist's description of the work as a '*Fotoübernähung*' can be translated literally as 'photo-over-suturing'. Sutures usually stitch together a wound, although in this piece there is no visible wound, nor opening. Subverting received perceptions of the repair of injuries to the body, the wound in *Selbst 10* seems to occur with the stitching, while referencing earlier constrictions.

In Soltau's performances that involve several people and their environment, notions of the haptic become more explicit and can be seen to stimulate other meanings. In events represented in photographs of *Demonstration* (19.1.1976), *Demonstration* (22.1.1976) and *Aktion 'Ver-Bindungen' (Connections)* (19.5.1976) [Figures 3.7 - 3.9 respectively], the artist again takes strong black thread and winds it around participants' heads until it constricts them individually and also hinders movement between them. Thus gestures and actions by one participant have consequences on another, either increasing or decreasing their constriction. When questioned as to the importance of black thread as opposed to any other colour, Soltau explains, "I only use black thread because it symbolizes the line from which it has developed. Also, it is more precise and gives a stronger contrast. Coloured thread would get lost easier and not be so effective."³⁶ Hans M. Schmidt describes these performances as acts of mummification, which on completion change the viewers' perception of the participants. He suggests that from initially empathizing with the increasing physical restriction of the participants' heads, once the limit of the wrapping has been reached, the viewer feels "less a feeling of compassion than a relatively disinterested

³⁶ Appendix 2.

curiosity.”³⁷ In this reading, issues of ‘otherness’ might be seen to arise once the body no longer looks as we expect it to. If it no longer fulfils our perceptions of the body because it fails to remind us of our own, or reminds us too much of what our own might look like in similar circumstances, for instance, bound, degraded and abject, then our reactions to it might be called into question. We might feel indifference, or horror, something that was later seen as central to the censorship Soltau experienced in relation to her *Generative* works.

We can find parallels between Soltau’s work and that of her contemporary, the Paraguayan artist Faith Wilding (b.1943), through a commonality in their use of thread. Wilding created the installation *Crocheted Environment*, originally titled *Womb Room* in 1972, [Figure 3.10] and Soltau’s work was juxtaposed with that of Wilding at the *WACK* exhibition in 2007. Although this was the first time Soltau had seen Wilding’s work, she had some knowledge of Wilding’s involvement in *Womanhouse* in the 1970s.³⁸ During her upbringing in a commune Wilding learned a variety of crafts, appropriating them for her art. Her ‘subversive stitches’ pay homage to women’s economic and cultural work through a non-practical piece of crochet, asserting her artistic creativity yet acknowledging the importance of craft and the perceived spaces of women. The web-like installation *Womb Room* indicates a haphazard space of haptic connections and voids, as she seems to expose what Amelia Jones has described as, “the forced passivity of a woman’s life in

³⁷ “Wie sich unsere Eindrücke im Ablauf der Demonstration schrittweise ändern, so auch die Empfindungen gegenüber der Person, mit der dies geschieht. Ist der äusserste Punkt der Umschnürung erreicht, wird die Vorstellung von Demonstrationobjekt, dem weniger das Gefühl der Mitmenschlichkeit als eine relativ gleichgültige Neugier aus distanzierter Beobachtung zuteil wird, am eindringlichsten.” H.M. Schmidt, ‘Eine Demonstration von Annegret Soltau’, in Hans Gercke, *Annegret Soltau*, (Darmstadt: Graphik-Kabinett, 1976), unpaginated.

³⁸ *Womanhouse* began as part of the feminist Art Programme of California Institute of Arts in a deserted house in Hollywood in 1971. An environment where several female artists created performance pieces about housework, women’s experiences and perceived roles, it opened to the public between 30 January and 28 February 1972, and was seen by many as the first feminist exhibition. <<http://womanhouse.refugia.net/>> [accessed 20 July 2010]

patriarchy".³⁹ The crocheted threads might be seen to depict discrepancies and disconnections between art and craft, between male and female, work and pleasure.⁴⁰ More an environment of spider's webs and seemingly random organic forms than a room, it is suggestive of surroundings and conditions of gendered experiences. Soltau believes that during the 1970s, global connections existed between women who were artists, as traditions in art and women's roles were shattered.⁴¹ This sentiment conjures a patchwork of female artists, spread worldwide that were concerned with similar questions during a particular period.

Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the haptic may also be of some relevance here. Although I am aware that they investigate their ideas principally as cultural abstractions, I appropriate them here in more concrete terms. In their exploration of cultural space, they suggest the haptic operates in a 'smooth space', that is, a space of affects rather than one of particular traits or properties, (which they term a 'striated space').⁴² Smooth space is an environment or landscape of disorganized matter that evokes a sensual or haptic response. Their technological example of textiles as smooth space is particularly apt to this chapter.⁴³ They argue that felted materials are generally more aligned to 'smooth spaces', whereas weaving produces a more striated space that is bounded by certain restrictions of width and method. Similar differences are also understood between patchwork and embroidery. Embroidery usually comprises one or more motifs organized into an aesthetic composition and

³⁹ Amelia Jones, 'Faith Wilding and the Enfleshing of Painting', *n. paradoxa*, (10 June 1999), <<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/n.paradoxa/nparadoxaissue10.pdf>> [accessed 25 November 2009] Also see Corrina Peipon, 'Faith Wilding', in Mack, (2007), p. 316.

⁴⁰ Faith Wilding, 'Monstrous Domesticity', *The Feminist eZine*, <<http://www.lilithgallery.com/feminist/domesticity.html>> [accessed 8 June 2010] Printed in *M/E/A/N/I/N/G: An Anthology of Artist' Writings, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. by Susan Bee and Mira Schor, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 87-1-5.

⁴¹ Appendix 2.

⁴² I explain my use of the term 'affect' in Chapter 2, Note 6.

⁴³ Deleuze and Guattari, (2004b), pp. 523-6.

constrained by agreed dimensions, whereas patchwork may consist of similar motifs, but placed together for effect rather than order. As early as 1955 Robert Rauschenberg famously combined paint and textiles in *Bed* [Figure 3.11]. Art critic John Russell suggests that in this piece, Rauschenberg “works literally in ‘the gap between art and life’, and as he contrives to close it, art and life merge into a single experience.”⁴⁴ For my discussion here, Russell’s use of the term ‘experience’ is key, since it refers so closely to ‘a space of affects’ as an embodied encounter. In Deleuzian terms *Bed* can be seen to evoke a haptic visuality in the combination of paint and the physical matter of bed coverings metonymically suggesting the body as both concept and physical being. Inherent in patchwork is the possibility of endless juxtaposition of individual pieces of fabric. These fragments were traditionally taken from worn-out clothing, rich with memory, and may be either regular or irregular shapes, colours, and textures. Sewn together they create not a homogeneous mass, but a more differentiated accumulation that might be described by a term borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari as an “*amorphous nonformal space*.”⁴⁵ Soltau may also be seen to work within similar parameters when she takes photographic images of the body, tears them into pieces, then stitches them together in seemingly random re-formations in her photo-stitchings.

The Serial Line

In 1971 Soltau’s use of line could be perceived as use of outline rather than a tangible hair or thread, and her early etching *Prägedruck* (1971) [Figure 3.12], which translates as ‘*Embossing*’, presents a faint delineation of several indistinct groups of people, some standing, others appearing to move across the picture plane, similar to

⁴⁴ John Russell, *The Meanings of Modern Art*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), p. 338.

⁴⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, (2004b), p. 526.

an image emerging on photographic paper from within the developing fluid. Soltau's technique in *Prägedruck* evokes notions of growth or development and has been discussed as signalling her etched images of cocooning, which she refers to as wrappings that have to be discarded to make way for something new.⁴⁶ This early and I would argue less tangible line is recognizable in several other formats in Soltau's later work. As a pen line in *Überzeichnete Frau* (*Overdrawn Woman*) (1972) [Figure 3.13], it accentuates connections between Soltau's body and the space around it. It has already been discussed as a spidery line plotting out cracks and fissures across the female head and in the swathes of hair and clothing in *Umschlossene* (1973), and *Umschlossener Kopf* (1974), as well as its mutation into black thread, and a performative line of constraint and connection.

During a period of intense personal crisis between 1976 and 1978, Soltau's art practice turned to more direct reminders of the body and the natural world through her use of hair and spider's webs. She collected and used actual hair in *Meine Verlorenen Haare* (*My Lost Hair*) (1977) [Figure 3.14], and spider's webs in an installation of spiders' webs and mannequin, *Eingesponnene Schaufensterpuppe* (*Wrapped Mannequin*) (1978) [Figure 3.15], and these two works will be examined in the last section of this chapter.⁴⁷ At around the same period she also explored line as a means of erasure in photo-etchings, incising with a needle directly into the surface layers of the photographic negative until all imagery is completely excised. Works using this technique include *Ich, Bedrückt* (*I, Depressed*), (1977-8), and *Schwanger* (*Pregnant*), *Im Gleichgewicht* (*In Equilibrium*), and *Erwartung*

⁴⁶ 'Annegret Soltau in conversation with Klaus D Pohl', *Annegret Soltau: ZeitErfahrung*, exh. cat. (Darmstadt: Hessisches Landesmuseum, 1994), unpaginated.

⁴⁷ *Meine Verlorenen Haare* (*My Lost Hair*) (1977) is a series of books that form a diary of hair either cut or lost each day during 1977. See Appendix 2.

(*Expectant*), all from 1980-81, and again, some of which I examine later in the chapter.

Soltau's serial use of line can also be seen to extend to other senses apart from the visual and the tactile. In *Identification*, the sixth sequence of her video *La Mamma* (1990), Soltau deploys an invisible yet auditory line or caesura as she cuts her hair with scissors.⁴⁸ In this sequence, she sits on a sheet with her two children on the floor, and taking a large pair of scissors from under the sheet she cuts some of her hair and places it on one child then later repeats this action with the other child. Each cut she makes with the scissors is heightened by the silence of the video, and recalls the physical cut of the umbilical link between mother and child. Although Soltau did not have Yoko Ono's performance *Cut Piece* (1964) [Figure 3.16] in mind when she made this video, certain parallels can be found between the works. Soltau is both the active subject and object in *Identification*, whereas Ono asks the audience to be the active participants in her performance; they cut her clothes. I suggest that Soltau's cutting and placing of the hair (as body) on her children is suggestive of a gift or ritual, something Julia Bryan-Wilson also reads in *Cut Piece* through Ono's body as a source of gifts.⁴⁹ Bryan-Wilson explores *Cut Piece* through three gestures: invitation, sacrifice and souvenir, and it is this later aspect that is suggestive of a gift, or commemorative object, something that the audience takes away and which might reference amongst other things fallout after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in 1945 by the United States, and which Ono herself experienced. Notions of trauma and loss are associated with the cutting of hair, and Soltau

⁴⁸ See <<http://www.annegret-soltau.de/Filme/filme.htm>> for an excerpt of this video.

⁴⁹ Julia Bryan-Wilson, 'Remembering Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*', *Oxford Art Journal*, 26, 1, (2003), 99-123 (p. 103). Ono's body is also subject to potential threats and risks from the unknown intentions of the audience in her performance.

reminds us of historical inscriptions of these themes onto the body, even as she asserts ideas of the maternal.

During the 1990s Soltau developed her serial attitude to line into a method of assemblage through the stitching together of fragments of photographs. In her *Generativ* (1994-2005) and *Transgenerativ* (2005) series, for instance, she assembles fragments of photographs of her family in various arrangements.⁵⁰ This technique compares to some extent with surgical repair; the front face of each work depicts a patchwork of identity or sutured wounds, while the reverse face results in a random series of stitches. When the works are exhibited free-hanging both faces are available to the viewer, indicating instability of any notion of a simple division between the outer and inner body; both faces suggest separate yet parallel narratives as embodied traces of identity.

Soltau's tracing of the haptic thread as a serial line might be understood from this brief list of her works as a 'life' line. I do not mean by this that it describes days, years or even stages in a life. Rather, it could be viewed as an invisible, variable and impermanent concept of life itself. Briony Fer describes Piero Manzoni's approach to the line, for example in his multiple work *Linea* (c.1959) [Figure 3.17], in terms redolent of Marxist ideas of structures of production and consumption.⁵¹ His 'lines' are artworks that Fer suggests in retrospect belong to a series, and his application of ink to an industrial roll of paper creates a line at once constant yet irregular. Unlike a cardiogram or similar device to monitor the human condition, as an 'object' Manzoni's line records a human action, made invisible by packaging the printed rolls

⁵⁰ The works mentioned are reproduced in Schmidt, (2006). It is not possible to discuss all these works in this chapter.

⁵¹ Fer, (2004), Chapter 2 'Series', pp. 6-45.

into labeled cylindrical tubes.⁵² He says: “The nature of the *Linea* is eternal and infinite, the concept is everything.”⁵³ Fer understands the ways he uses line as symptoms “continually subject to conversion and displacement.”⁵⁴ I suggest this phrase could also be used to describe Soltau’s line (although not in a Marxist framework of production and consumption, which is how Manzoni appears to approach his art practice).⁵⁵ Soltau actively metamorphoses the ‘object’, that is, she changes or varies the line between the materials of hair, cobwebs, thread, etching, and sound. Whilst the various conversions and displacements of Soltau’s lines could be read simply as different forms of artistic expression, I suggest that her statements about the importance of the haptic for her, and her strategies of exploring this concept seem to unconsciously echo a transference of emotion or feeling between the physical body and the line in ways that cannot be reduced to a single interpretation.

Although Soltau has never considered her use of line in relation to Manzoni’s *Linea*, she suggests that a connection between their art practices exists. Taking the concept of a line, she sent a letter to numerous people to draw a line and return it to her, intending to assemble them all into a single work, although the project has never been completed.⁵⁶ Manzoni indicates that in his work the line is “zero, not zero as the end, but as the beginning of an infinite series.”⁵⁷ Soltau, on the other hand, describes the line in her photo-etchings, for instance, *Ich, Bedrückt (I, Depressed)* (1977-8) [Figure 3.18], or *Im Gleichgewicht (In Equilibrium)* (1980-1) [Figure 3.19] thus: “I

⁵² Fer’s emphasis here, in Fer, (2004), p. 35.

⁵³ Germano Celant, *Piero Manzoni*, (London and Milan: Serpentine Trust and Charta, 1998), p. 110.

⁵⁴ Fer, (2004), p. 35.

⁵⁵ Fer, (2004), p. 35. Fer suggests that Manzoni demanded that his *Linea* works should be exhibited in cardboard tubes, making the actual ‘art’ invisible, as both part of his “strategy of self-exposure” and also to draw attention to the issue of commodity exchange, i.e. production and consumption. He makes a similar sentiment in another of his works; *Artist’s Shit* (1961), consisting of 90 tins of faeces, was priced at the equivalent weight of gold.

⁵⁶ Appendix 2.

⁵⁷ Celant, (1998), p. 128, and Fer, (2004), p. 35

start with the whole then I fill it to a whole blank. This blank is not necessarily a void, only in the technical material aspect, not the meaning of it for me.”⁵⁸ Where Manzoni’s line might be seen as a conceptual beginning, Soltau’s ‘whole blank’ is more ambiguous; it might be physical, spiritual or emotional. Erasure of the body in her photo-etchings seems to suggest embodiment as a site of obliteration that can be excised and destroyed, while blankness evokes a lacuna or loss of body, although both these are purely conjectural interpretations of Soltau’s statement.

Responses to Trauma: Hair, Webs and Thread

There can be no doubt that Annegret Soltau’s traumatic life experiences have had an impact on her sense of self. Given away by her mother at only a few months old, Soltau grew up with her taciturn and undemonstrative grandmother. As the artist says: “I just toddled along...I was so alone.”⁵⁹ As a teenager, Soltau was again denied the experience of a mother/daughter relationship, when her mother chose to refer to her as her sister. In psychological terms the events of her stringent early life, and untraceable father may have impacted on her work, as she discusses in both interviews,⁶⁰ and ‘Autobiographical Portrait’.⁶¹ During the 1990s, trauma studies expanded as an interdisciplinary field led mainly by literary theory, including that by

⁵⁸ Appendix 2.

⁵⁹ “Ich lief einfach so mit...Ich war sehr allein.” Soltau quoted in *Seitenblicke: Sichtweisen auf das Werk von Annegret Soltau*, ed. by Annegret Soltau, and others, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftstadt, (2006), p. 23.

⁶⁰ Karin Struck in Schmidt, (2006), Annegret Soltau and Renate Petzinger, *Von Innen Nach Aussen*, (Darmstadt: Merck, 1996), Sigrun Paas in Annegret Soltau, *Fragmente des Ichs*, exh. cat. (Mainz: Mainzer Kunstverein, 1991), unpaginated, and Gisliind Nabokowski in Annegret Soltau, *Annegret Soltau*, exh. cat. (Münsterschwarzach: Vier-Türme-Verlag, 1983b), unpaginated.

⁶¹ Annegret Soltau, ‘Autobiographical Portrait’,

<http://www.annegret-soltau.de/_dateien/biografisches%20Portrait.pdf> [accessed 3 December 2009]
Freud calls the deferment of the traumatic shock from consciousness until it resurfaces later as *Nachträglichkeit*. Sigmund Freud, ‘Remembering, Repeating and Working Through’ in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, trans. by John Reddick, (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 35-6.

Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman.⁶² Whilst their work is valuable as background to the complex subject matter of trauma, they have specifically explored literature and what art theorist Jill Bennett calls ‘testimonial politics’. Some aspects of what Caruth says of trauma might be seen as haunting Soltau’s work:

“so trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature - the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance - returns to haunt the survivor later on.”⁶³

I suggest that the ways trauma can be seen to haunt the artwork, and which in turn enables it (trauma) to become a catalyst for the audience to engage with, can contribute to the aesthetic experience.⁶⁴ Soltau’s art practices can be seen to explore the processes of injury and change that influence or lead to breakdown of identity, and the inevitable disintegration of the body. Caruth suggests that threats against the body and experiences through emotional and psychological dangers, if not directly available at the time of occurrence, might be understood as the “enigma of survival.”⁶⁵ This conjures a paradoxical relationship between the traumatic experience and survival of it, and a legacy of bewilderment at the experience.⁶⁶

From almost the beginning of her artistic career, Soltau uses her practice to question how the female artist can find equilibrium between art and life as well as exploring the significance of the matrilineal line through metamorphosis. That is, through the

⁶² Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University, 1995), and Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University, 1996). Shoshana Felman, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, (New York: Routledge, 1991), and Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge, Mass, and London: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁶³ Caruth, (1996), p. 4.

⁶⁴ I have found both Caruth and Bennett’s writing invaluable to my understanding of trauma; Caruth for her explanations of the concept and working of trauma, and Bennett for untangling the complex topic of how and why we react to specific artworks in certain ways, and what it is about them that stimulates us to think deeply, see Bennett, (2005), p. 7.

⁶⁵ Cathy Caruth, ‘Violence and Time: Traumatic Survivals’, *Assemblage*, 20, (April 1993), 24-5 (p. 24).

⁶⁶ This is discussed later in this chapter.

actual embodied stages of living (birth, childhood, maturity and ageing), rather than the cyclical nature of life. Bennett draws on a Deleuzian explanation of how trauma can work in art historical terms when she suggests it is revealed within the art work by certain affects that evoke visual reminders of the languages of trauma, whatever they may be. That is to say, the artist's work as a site of negotiation of trauma rather than a means of dissemination becomes a powerful and penetrating means of communication. To quote Deleuze:

“The truths which intelligence grasps directly in the open light of day have something less profound, less *necessary* about them than those which life has communicated to us *in spite of ourselves* in an impression.”⁶⁷

In Soltau's work, her responses to personal trauma can be seen as twofold. Responding to psychological trauma immediately before she became pregnant for the first time, she drew directly from her body (through actual hair, and spiderwebs). During her pregnancy she either tore apart and re-stitched images of her pregnant body, or etched into the negatives of photographic images of herself. Throughout 1977 Soltau collected hair each day, either from natural loss over which she had no control, as a repetitive dissolution of the body, or as cuttings that she consciously made. From these she formed the diary *Meine Verlorenen Haare* (*My Lost Hair*) (1977), using one page for each day, onto which she placed her hair after ironing it to keep it flat. She says: “I simply wanted to fix these hairs because they were part of my body that I'd lost.”⁶⁸ Alluding to notions of abjection, these pressed tangles and coils are samples of the body, lost through wastage but, in this diary, as a naturalist might collect and fix an accumulation of specimens. As a serial hallmark of identity, repeated three hundred and sixty five times, the samples are genetically identical, yet

⁶⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, trans. Richard Howard, (London: Continuum, 2008), p.1.

⁶⁸ Appendix 2.

visually different, as daily repetitive performances of the (female) body.⁶⁹ Because of our knowledge of Soltau's biography, it is possible to speculate that these inscriptions of the abjecting body might combine earlier traumatic memories with the fear of later loss of identity; as documentation of an extended performance of embodiment. In autobiographical terms such serial gestures might supply a suggestion of stability to notions about the instability of the female body. Art historian Lutz Fichtner finds correspondences between Soltau's work and that of Francis Bacon, and suggests both have brutalized the body in their portrayals of fear and power. Fichtner says in relation to Bacon's paintings, "reason can always find a way round emotional sensation and even block it out completely."⁷⁰ Soltau's practice of 'blocking out' the body, of concealing its dissolution (if this is what she does), seems to have been one based on separation/loss. Soltau has made it clear that she was afraid motherhood would stifle her artistic practice, and having once embarked on it, could not wish it away, as her own mother did.⁷¹ Not only does the fear of losing her 'artistic life' impinge on her work around this time, but as sociologist Farideh Akashe-Böhme considers:

"being pregnant is a massive incalculable change of life and for modern woman a biographical cut which changes everything – pregnancy is experienced as an undertaking which one has taken, but which seems to work towards an end with threatening unstability, and in which you are powerless."⁷²

⁶⁹ As well as the hair diary, Soltau also kept a written diary and created a series of wash drawings.

⁷⁰ "Empfindung kann den Verstand einschliessen, aber der Verstand kann die Empfindung immer umgehen oder sogar ausblenden". Lutz Fichtner, 'Annegret Soltau und Francis Bacon – ein Gedankenspiel Zu ihrer Form des künstlerischen Ausdrucks', ('Annegret Soltau and Francis Bacon: Playing with ideas in relation to their forms of artistic expressions'), in Schmidt, (2006), p. 97.

⁷¹ Appendix 2. Soltau has expressed concern that she could not be a good mother, because she lacked a role model.

⁷² 'Das heisst für die moderne Frau besonders ein biographischer Einschnitt, der alles ändert. Die Schwangerschaft selbst wird als ein Unternehmen erfahren, auf das man sich eingelassen hat, das aber mit einer bedrohlichen Unaufhaltsamkeit fortschreitet zu einem Ende, dessen man nicht mächtig ist'. Farideh Akashe-Böhme, 'Leibliche Existenz als Bedrängnis', ('Physical Existence as Distress'), in Schmidt, (2006), p.137.

Meine Verlorenen Haare comprises several volumes of identical books, and can be seen as a document of the body fragmenting yet frozen in time. As a diary, it is personal, maybe not in the outright manner of what art critic Adrian Searle recently described as Tracey Emin's (b. 1963) 'confessional performances of life', but Soltau, like Emin can be seen to fuse both life and work in ways that can resonate with their embodied audiences.⁷³ *Meine Verlorenen Haare* articulates a notion of trauma that confronts the viewer with an explicit reminder of the insidious, personal and individual disintegration of the body from birth, and which to some extent we all repress, as well as being a self-reflexive *memento mori*. (This work has never been exhibited, and my responses to it were shaped to some extent by my awareness of Soltau's biography, and from my own gendered position as a woman and mother.)

When Soltau wanted a child yet was fearful of its consequences in her life she began to work directly with real hair, which might be seen as a retreat into her body. The fragility of hair can evoke the vulnerability of feminine corporeality and its possible invasion by another living being. Just as the materiality of death may induce sensations of abjection, so too might hair as a liminal material between the inner and outer body. The actual moments of childbirth when the unborn child moves from the womb to the world mirrors the liminal quality of hair as it grows inside the body and moves outwards beyond what is perceived as the body's boundaries (through the skin). Both child and hair emerge from their internal spaces of life into spaces external to the body, spaces of certain death. In this way hair can be seen simultaneously as a metonym for the physical body in maternal processes, and conceptually in the life cycle.

⁷³ Adrian Searle, 'Tracey Emin: Excess all Areas', *The Guardian*, (16 May 2011).

I argue that its significance in Soltau's work here is a means of connecting or conflating the physical and the philosophical in relation to issues of trauma and motherhood. In *Stabat Mater*, Julia Kristeva attempts a philosophical understanding of how women who choose motherhood are in a bind between this and relinquishing their own desires and direction, and I find it particularly apt as an aid to understanding Soltau's *Meine Verlorenen Haare*.⁷⁴ In viewing her diary, one might be impelled to make connections between a nexus of issues including disintegration of the self, anxiety of renouncing part of one's identity to motherhood, and the complex feelings embodied in the separation of the child from the maternal body. Soltau's creation of a diary as an aesthetic object represents what might be seen as a visual discourse of the self over several volumes. How the viewer empathizes, engages or negotiates with the affects of the work can continue a dialogue of how we see 'feeling'.⁷⁵ To paraphrase Bennett, emotions, for example, how we feel about an event, circumstances and so on, are experienced in the present. She claims that when we remember the events and circumstances that gave rise to the original emotions, they become representations, distanced by time. We think about the emotions, rather than actually feeling them, by seeing ourselves from the outside rather than feeling from the inside. I suggest that through affective responses, in this instance to Soltau's diaries, the viewer might recall their own past emotions as remembered events relating to a different self to the one present and looking at the work.⁷⁶

When Soltau began the diary as a trace of herself, she had already indicated her interest in the concept of the body as a trace, both in her early performances with

⁷⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. by Leon S Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 234-63.

⁷⁵ The phrase 'seeing feeling' is borrowed from Bennett, (2005), p. 22.

⁷⁶ Bennett, (2005), pp. 22-3. She also explores emotions that are not retrievable, but can be revived. That is, the event can be recalled and in doing so produces new sensations. She suggests affect in these instances can produce 'real-time somatic experience', which is no longer a representation.

their environment, and also in her work with spider's webs. In the series *Material-ZEICHNUNG Spinne* (*Material-Drawing Spider* (1976-7) [Figure 3.20], she collected spider's webs, blackened by soot and dirt from dusty attics, and secured them to paper with a layer of film. The webs create tangles similar to the meshes of the black threads in *Permanente Demonstration*, and also those in the hair diary. Just as hair grows outwards from within the body, the spider's web is spun out from within. However, the spider's glands or spinnerets have different functions, unlike hair follicles. Some cobwebs work as safety or draglines, others as trapping or wrapping lines, and are reminiscent not only materially of hair itself but also of how Soltau uses threads in her performances. That is to say, the effect of the thread ensnaring the human bodies is akin to being covered in tangled hair; some threads wrap, others trap.

The spiderweb drawings can be seen to work in similar ways to the hair diary, making permanent the temporary, and containing yet safeguarding the abject and contradictory material of this creature, whose hairy threadiness dissolves under our touch into smaller and smaller spans.⁷⁷ These drawings were exhibited as part of the *Material-ZEICHNUNG Spinne* exhibition in which a mannequin, *Eingesponnene Schaufensterpuppe* (*Wrapped Mannequin*) (1978), is wrapped in threads, and connected by cobwebs to the gallery space, furniture and the spider drawings.⁷⁸ To paraphrase Kathrin Schmidt, who points out the importance of spatial contexts to this piece, the threads spin across over the edges of the paper and create webs of

⁷⁷ If we walk into a cobweb and it covers our face, our instinct is to recoil. Attempts to remove cobwebs often result in their dissolution into smaller spans of web that adhere to any surfaces touched even as they disappear.

⁷⁸ This exhibition was held at the Galerie Friebe in Darmstadt in 1978.

connections with furniture and mannequins as if to show the human context.⁷⁹ The threads simultaneously mirror and contradict the spiderwebs, and evoke a gendered experience of time, compliance, neglect or even death.

Soltau raises the issue of time firstly in the creation and accumulation of cobwebs, and secondly in the references to the domestic which locate and literally bind the mannequin as if frozen in time. The familiar proxy of a mannequin acts as a substitute for the female body, ensnared in her own representation as well as our responses to or expectations of her. Rather than functioning as a vehicle for the clothes we want to buy, this ambivalent figure in Soltau's work is more an expression of abjection. The domestic setting suggested in the installation subverts perceptions of woman as home-maker through the spiderwebs. As a trope, the spider can be found in the work of other modern artists, most notably that of Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010). For Bourgeois the spider became associated with spaces of sanctuary; her large-scale sculptural spiders can be seen as metaphors for the psychological spaces of protection, and her mother's patient weaving. In a review of Bourgeois' work immediately after her death, Searle writes: "In her art, women became houses, mothers became spiders, and spiders hung around 'the doorways of the years' like prostitutes."⁸⁰ Bourgeois' parallel theme of women in the home and the concept of *femme maison* has been visible in her work since the mid-1940s, and aspects of the treatment of these themes can also be seen in Soltau's work, although

⁷⁹ "Wichtig ist ihr bei diesen Arbeiten, dass der Bezug zum räumlichen Kontext nicht verloren geht. Auch hier, spinnen' sich die Fäden weiter über den Papierrand hinaus und lassen ein Geflecht aus Verbindungen entstehen. Wie wichtig der Künstlerin diese Botschaft ist, zeigt sich in Aufnahmen aus der Ausstellung der Spinnenwebenbilder in der Darmstädter Galerie Karin Friebe 1978. Dort hatte Soltau zusätzlich zu ihren Material-zeichnungen Spinne ein Gespinst aus Fäden durch den Raum gesponnen, das bis hin zum Mobiliar und einer Schaufensterpuppe die menschliche Umgebung einband in ihr materiell gewordenen Geflecht." Schmidt, (2006), p. 28.

⁸⁰ Adrian Searle, 'Louise Bourgeois: A Web of Emotions', *The Guardian*, (1 June 2010). See also Elaine Showalter, 'Lumps, Bumps, Bulbs, Bubbles, Bulges, Slits, Turds, Coils, Craters, Wrinkles and Holes', *Tate etc*, 11 (Autumn 2007).

at the time of the *Material-ZEICHNUNG Spinne* exhibition, Soltau was not aware of her work.⁸¹ This installation might be seen as a forerunner for Soltau's later *Generativ* series of photo-stitchings, work that Hans Gercke suggests is to do with "a network of relationships between life and death."⁸² Perceptions of the outer beauty of form of the female body, is again contradicted by its inherent susceptibility to physical degradation.

In the controversial *Generativ* series, Soltau's uses thread to connect the matriarchal generations in her family. The front faces of the works are an assemblage of fragments of her grandmother, mother, self and daughter that depict the ageing female body as the women link arms and gaze directly at the viewer. In Figure 3.1 the heads and chest areas of the four women have been transposed; the grandmother appears to wear her great granddaughter's breasts and upper torso as a corset. The lower torsos and legs of all four women have been torn and reconstructed. Irregular stitches and knots on the reverse faces correspond to discrepancies in the female form, and one becomes aware of what is not visible but can be felt at a different level; for example, as traces of experiences or pain.⁸³ The pictorial play between front and back can be seen to correspond to the outer and inner body, while the assembly of one generation within another evokes the impermanence of life. As I mentioned earlier, signs of ageing of these ill-fitting, patchwork female bodies was a factor in the censure of these works, explained in the introductory comments at the Darmstadt Forum. As one of the contributors to another short book dedicated to

⁸¹ Email communication with the artist 2 August 2011. The term *femme maison* means womanhouse or housewife.

⁸² "Auch hier geht es um ein Netz von Beziehungen zwischen Leben und Tod." Hans Gercke, 'Lebenszeichen – zu den Arbeiten von Annegret Soltau', in Annegret Soltau, *Annegret Soltau: Lebenszeichen FOTO-Arbeiten und VIDEO- Bänder, 12 Februar- 4 März 1984*, (Heidelberg Kunstverein: Benedict Press, 1984), p. 5.

⁸³ Inge Lorenz, 'Einleitung' (Introduction), in Benz, (1997), pp. 8-13.

Soltau (by the Minister for Economy and Urban Development in her home town of Darmstadt), surgeon Klaus Griesenbeck explains his views on these body images in relation to his own work. He suggests similarities between what he sees on a daily basis and what Soltau has created. Although, to him “something horrifying, unnatural and ugly emanates from this collage [*Generativ*]”, his own experiences of cutting into the body (in operations) lead him to see those live bodies as equally far removed from the human ideal.⁸⁴ In other words, the deterioration of the human body through ageing (or other factors) might indeed be repulsive to look upon (in reality, as well as in art works such as *Generativ*). However, it is not unexpected, although we may find it difficult to acknowledge, given the significance placed by the beauty industry, celebrity culture and so on, on youthful looks and firm, wrinkle-free flesh.

Historically, ambiguities of ageing have been depicted through iconographical means, for instance, in Vanitas paintings through symbols of transience and death.⁸⁵ A correlation might also be drawn between Soltau’s *Generativ* and *An Allegory of Prudence* (1550-65) by Titian (c.1490-1576). In the latter, youth, maturity and old age are depicted in combined portraits of the artist’s cousin and heir, his son, and himself respectively.⁸⁶ Where Titian might be seen as depicting a lifespan through what Erwin Panofsky describes as emblematic means, Soltau literally cuts into the body of the matrilineal line, emphasizing the physical changes experienced by women. *Generativ* might be seen as simultaneously destructive and healing; youth contains parts of her parents and ancestors, while the aged great-grandmother retains

⁸⁴ Klaus Griesenbeck in Soltau, and others, (2006), p. 46.

⁸⁵ Lorenz in Benz (1997), p. 12. Vanitas paintings were popular, particularly in The Netherlands during the seventeenth-century.

⁸⁶ Panofsky tells us that this painting carries the inscription ‘Ex Praeterito/Praesens Prvdenter Agit/Nifvtvra Actione Detvrpet’ (From [the experience of] the past, the present acts prudently, lest it spoil future actions), Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, (London: Peregrine Books, 1970), p. 184.

some part of youth, and all are further united in an ancestral line by the stitching.

Soltau says of this work:

“The thread also means something that connects and repairs, that unites tears and keeps together what has been torn apart. The tears in a life history remain visible like the wrinkles as traces of life.”⁸⁷

Identity and Erasure

Between 1977 and 1981, and as mentioned earlier, Soltau began working with processes of photo-etching. Through technical procedures and processes Soltau excavates both the photographic upper layer of the negative and the layer beneath using an etching tool. This involves developing a photographic film to produce a negative, which Soltau then scratches into. In principle, each series of work comes from one negative, which is reworked several times, and at each stage a photographic print is made, with the constantly accruing etched lines and accumulations of waste from both the surface layer and substrate of the negative all visible on the negative and, correspondingly, in the prints made from it. In effect, the negative becomes a metonym for the body and its physical and psychical experiences.

In the 20-photo series *Ich, Bedrückt (I, Depressed)* (1977-8) [Figure 3.18], created before the birth of her first child, the first frame/print depicts Soltau sitting at a table, head low and wrapped by her left arm. Her right arm stretches loosely across the table. The following prints show the figure increasingly covered in fine hairline marks, until the image of the figure mutates from threadiness to a patchy and amorphous shape. Prints from the negative are sometimes reversed so that the body appears to toss from side to side, facing first one way, then the other. White areas

⁸⁷ “Der faden bedeutet aber auch etwas Verbindendes, Reparierendes, was die Risse zusammenbringt und-hält. Die Risse im Lebenslauf bleiben sichtbar wie die Falten als Lebensspuren.” Annegret Soltau in Soltau, and others, (2006), p. 12.

where the etching needle has obliterated both the upper photographic layer and the substrate suggest a charred human landscape; its opacity appearing simultaneously richly significant yet empty. Soltau's description of the final negative as a whole blank, without necessarily being a hole or void, further indicates the impenetrability of these photo-etchings. Prints made from the negative during this process become increasingly dark until the final print taken is of dense blackness (when the negative is completely destroyed except for its frame). I suggest that Soltau's evocations of the body, through hair, line and representation, here in her photo-etchings, can be seen as an intricate language of the trauma and erasure of the 'self'.

Parallels can be drawn between the action of 'wounding' the negative, and implications of loss of identity through pregnancy. Renate Berger describes this as, "the insuppressible fear of never physically being the same, a shell, a part dies with the new, the other."⁸⁸ The physical body of the pregnant woman is subjected to the intrusion of the growing foetus and its demands on her. At the same time she experiences the attention of the medical staff, their tests, monitors and invasive examinations. In addition, the expectant mother may experience doubts and fears for the future, for both the child and herself, and the possibility of losing what she has experienced as life before pregnancy, for an alternative version of life after parturition. Soltau includes in an exhibition catalogue titled *Annegret Soltau* (1983) (which accompanied an exhibition of the same name in Frankfurt that year), a letter purported to have been written to her by her own mother. I suggest this might go some way to explaining the actions of the artist in scratching away the image in the

⁸⁸ " – die nicht beiseitezudrängende Furcht, physisch nie mehr dieselbe, Hülle, zu sein, abzusterben über dem Neuen, das andere." Renate Berger, *Der Mensch als Readymade: Annegret Soltau*, (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 1992), p. 59.

photographic negative.⁸⁹ In it Soltau's mother explains how she felt when she found she was pregnant with Annegret. It was at the end of WW11 and by the time she went to see a doctor she was already in the fifth or sixth month of pregnancy. After Annegret was born, her mother took her with her out to the fields where she worked, but after about nine months gave Annegret to her grandmother.

Soltau's intrusions in the negative, her 'meddling' with the image of the developing female body, might be seen as a metaphor for abortion ventures, and even interference attempts by her own mother when she was carrying Annegret. Whilst not specifically suggesting this reading, Soltau offers the reader her mother's moving explanation:

"I knew I was pregnant. I started to panic and thought it will have to go. I jumped down from tables and benches, put my feet in cold and hot water, stretched my body and drank certain herbal teas, but it stayed."⁹⁰

During Soltau's first pregnancy, intervention as a concept becomes more conspicuous in her work as she also intrudes into photographic prints of her body, rather than into the negative (as a developing image of the body). In a series of photo-stitchings entitled *Schwanger (Pregnant)* 1977, photographs of her naked body, and reminiscent of medical operations, are torn and stitched together. Figure 3.21 shows her curled upright in an embryonic position with her eyes closed. In this photograph stitches are visible over her left cheek and neck, down her torso and left arm and both legs.⁹¹ In Figure 3.22 Soltau is half reclining on her back, arms by her sides and looking upwards. Her knees are drawn up and held tightly together, as if

⁸⁹ Annegret Soltau, *Annegret Soltau*, exh. cat. (Frankfurt: Frankfurter Kunstverein, 1983a), pp. 24-5.

⁹⁰ I understand Soltau's mother to infer here that the baby, that had 'come' into her body, must now be made to 'go' out from her body. "Als sich nichts tat, wusste ich, das ich schwanger bin. Ich kam in Panik und dachte, es muss weider abgehen. Ich sprang von Tisch und Bänke, steckte meine Füße in kaltes und heisses Wasser, streckte meinen Körper und trank bestimmte Kräuterteas, aber es bleib." Soltau, (1983), p. 24.

⁹¹ Schmidt, (2006), p. 30.

preparing herself against an invasion of her privacy.⁹² A long white line scars her body from her mouth, down her neck, across her left breast, through her navel, and over the abdomen to the pubic area. At right angles to this line are black stitches pinning the torn photograph together. This second image, more than the first, intimates the vulnerability of the female body to traumatic intrusions of either medical intervention associated with pregnancy and stitches, or to abjection in the form of childbirth.

This aspect of Soltau's work might be seen as following in a tradition of other German women artists such as Kathe Kollwitz (1867-1945), whose work is usually embraced within the category of social realism. In 1997 Wuerth and Monger referenced Kollwitz's work in their exploration of the German abortion debate in relation to the work of Soltau and another German artist, Maina-Miriam Munsky (1943-99). During the 1970s and 1980s Munsky's art practice centred on themes of pregnancy and childbirth within the clinical spaces of medicine. Her *Elektrode* (1973) [Figure 3.23], depicts a woman attached to various monitors submitting her body to the clinical work of medical practitioners. Wuerth and Monger suggest that where Munsky is concerned with reproductive technologies, Soltau actively resists these and "forces the eye to see only the skin, inviting the tension this elicits."⁹³ In Soltau's photo-stitchings, the skin is barely held together by the black thread, reminding us of the fragility of the surface layer or image of the female body, and the vulnerability of the flesh.

⁹² Soltau, *Annegret Soltau: ZeitErfahrung*, exh.cat. (Darmstadt: Hessisches Landesmuseum, 1994), unpaginated.

⁹³ Andrea Wuerth and Janice Monger, 'The Body as Battleground: Images of the German Abortion Debate', in *Conquering Women: Women and War in the German Cultural Imagination*, ed. by Hillary Collier Sy-Quia and Susanne Baackman, (Berkeley: University of California, 2000), 12-39 (p. 22). <<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/36q6n0wc>> [accessed 21 June 2011]

Experiences of the Wounded Body

On 26 April 1986, one of four nuclear reactors at Chernobyl in the former Soviet Union exploded with widespread nuclear contamination of much of the northern hemisphere.⁹⁴ Soltau's photo-collage series *Mutter-Glück: Nach Chernobyl (Mother-Joy: after Chernobyl)* (1990) appears to be a direct artistic response to this disaster (see Figure 3.24). In this image black thread, as an aesthetic extension of hair, sutures together fragments of the faces of herself and her children within the outline of their heads. In each work of the series smaller torn images are layered behind the central image. A slightly eerie greenish light floods the background, and at random over some of the smaller stitched fragments, particularly areas of noses, eyes and mouths. The viewer is invited, even impelled, to consider effects of radiation, birth defects, and blindness by the juxtaposition of the facial elements. Meanwhile, the extraneous images surrounding the rectangular edge of the photograph, jut out beyond the boundaries of the picture plane just as the connecting threads in the performance *Permanente Demonstration* or the cobweb installation *Eingesponnene Schaufensterpuppe* appear as interactions with their environments. Soltau explains her technique and thinking behind the work:

"I build up using the principles of destruction in order to let something new come into being out of it..."⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Up to 30 people are reported to have died within three months as a direct result of the disaster. More than five million people lived in areas contaminated by the fallout. Approximately 135,000 people living within a 30km radius were resettled by the beginning of May 1986, with a further 210,000 in later years. The 2000 United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation report suggests that apart from a large increase in childhood cancers, there was "no evidence of a major public health impact attributable to radiation exposure 14 years after the accident." However people in the area have suffered "a paralysing fatalism" due to the perceived threats of radiation, which has led to chronic dependency, particularly smoking and alcohol. This information is taken from the World Nuclear Association website: <<http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/chernobyl/inf07.html>> See also <http://www.unscear.org/unscear/en/publications/2000_2.html> [accessed 20 July 2010]

⁹⁵ From a letter exchange between Soltau and her husband the artist Baldur Greiner dated 23 October 1986, when she and her children spent a year at the Villa Massimo, (the German School of Art in Rome), Annegret Soltau, 'From the Letter Exchange between Baldur Greiner in Darmstadt and Annegret Soltau in Rome, during work on the sculpture *Angst nach Tschernobyl*', in Baldur Greiner, *Angst nach Tschernobyl: Skulptur und Holzschnitte*, (Darmstadt: HL Schlapp, 1988), p. 19.

The *Mutter-Glück: Nach Chernobyl* series prompts the viewer to consider environmental and ethical questions regarding protection of future generations from events such as Chernobyl. The obvious connection between mother and children suggests a notion of maternal instincts; they appear as a closely-knit unit, albeit as disjointed human beings. On the reverse faces of the individual works, Soltau displays the hair-like threads that bind them together. Where those on the front face are fairly evenly spaced and appear to repair the external 'face' area of the heads from hairline round to chin and back again, the threads on the *Rückseite* (back) follow the outline of the face areas, but include knots, crossed stitches, long geometric lines and loose threads, mirroring the chaos of the disfigured front face. None of them directly indicate the human presence visible on the front of the work, but they evoke the internal workings of the body; its veins, arteries and neural pathways. Deliberate mismatching of the facial imagery in this series can suggest the fragile balance between our delight in what is perceived as normal, and horror, malformation, and human disrespect of life.

Schmidt makes the valid point that in all Soltau's work, the human face is of central importance. In her early etchings it remains uncovered, as if a culturally open document.⁹⁶ However, in *NY Faces- chirurgische Operationen X* (21.11.2001) [Figure 3.25], and *NY Faces- chirurgische Operationen XX* (8.2.2002) [Figure 3.26], the mouth takes precedence over other areas of the face as the prime organ of communication. The original photographs on which Soltau worked for the series *NY Faces- chirurgische Operationen* (*surgical operation*) were taken in a photo booth in New York on 25 March 1999, at the time of the Kosovo conflict in the Balkans.

⁹⁶ "Im Gegensatz zum Rest des Körpers zeigt es sich - zumindest in unseren Kulturkreisen - meist unverhüllt." (Unlike the rest of the body, it appears, at least in our culture - mostly naked.) Schmidt, (2006), p. 31.

Soltau has overstitched photographs onto these from her own dental surgery to produce images of horror that are possibly the most visually disturbing of all her work. In *NY Faces- chirurgische Operationen X* bristly lashes provide synecdochic representations of eyes that, even if they were open, would be looking upwards into the skull rather than outwards to the world. The nose has disappeared completely into an area of stitching, the ears are invisible beneath the hair, and the gaping mouth reveals the internal body. Its fleshy redness, framed by protruding lips and bared teeth, seems to shriek in horror, and forces the viewer to witness the aggression of the perpetrator and the vulnerability of the victim. We have seen news bulletins of horrific violence to the human body, but Soltau arguably invites us to be participants, however unwillingly, in first-hand footage of a specific event, using the distorted face as a metonym for the body. These images refer not to an unknown victim, who as Hans Schmidt suggested might be seen with 'disinterested curiosity', but to the artist who is both victim/patient and doctor, stitching herself together with a needle and strong black thread, and the face she wears can be seen as a symbolic mask of searing pain.

Soltau's imagery in these works contributes to the trope of women artists exploring the visceral horror of the body in trauma. These might be seen as containing a legacy from the work of the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo (1907-54). Kahlo's paintings depict trauma and the female body, and have often been discussed as a conflation of her life and art.⁹⁷ Drawing on their own experiences and corporeal traumas, the American Hannah Wilke (1940-93) and British artist Jo Spence (1934-92) both document in different ways what it feels like to occupy their bodies, and their responses to disease

⁹⁷ Hayden Herrera's *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo*, (London: Bloomsbury, 1989), for example, is one of an innumerable articles and books on Kahlo and her work.

and its treatment.⁹⁸ The photographic works of Spence and Soltau can be seen to describe the vulnerability of the body to both disease and also to the activities of the medical profession, who literally fragment the body, and appropriate and compartmentalize those parts of interest to them.

NY Faces- chirurgische Operationen XX 8.2.2002 [Figure 3.26] suggests an even more aggressive destruction of the self. Here the face has largely been removed to reveal teeth lining a cavity, a broad band of flesh reminiscent of the fat on a cut of meat, a large syringe injecting into the gums, and most repugnant of all, an opening at the top of the face from where the head appears to dissipate externally. Through her use of this gash, evocative of the female genital area, Soltau seems to hint at a world, literally turned on its head. An entry in her daybook from 2000, where she quotes Meret Oppenheim, suggests that violence against the female was a central concern for her at that time:

“28. March.

Every really new idea is in fact an act of aggression. And aggression is a characteristic that is absolutely contradictory to the image of femininity which men carry around within themselves and which they project onto women. (Meret Oppenheim).⁹⁹

The reverse faces of these two works again show the stitching, knots and loose ends. Into these stitches and threads, reminiscent of tousled hair and referencing the body through metaphor rather than being of the body, Soltau has included scraps of newsprint; one reads ‘Afghanistan’, another ‘*Kampf*’ and a third, ‘*teuflische Tat*’. Soltau directly references the war in Afghanistan, through the words ‘struggle/conflict’ and ‘diabolical deed’, and openly moves the work from the

⁹⁸ See Wilke’s *Starification Object Series*, (1974-82), and *Intra-Venus Series #1*, June 15 and January 30, (1992-3), and Jo Spence’s *A Picture of Health* (1980-).

⁹⁹ Quotation used in Annegret Soltau’s ‘Monologue’, (her work daybook)

<http://www.annegret-soltau.de/bibliographie/Monolog_Soltau.pdf> [accessed 21 December 2009]
See also Silvia Bovenschen and Beth Weckmueller, ‘Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?’, *New German Critique*, 10 (Winter, 1977), 111-137.

personal to the political, while her 'subversive' and rough stitching challenges preconceptions of the feminine as a locus of nurture. They might be seen as directing the viewer towards an unbearable haptic visuality founded on pain, suffering and violence. As Roland Barthes said in *Camera Lucida*, "The photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because nothing in it can be refused or transformed."¹⁰⁰ Drawing on Barthes' comment, it might be suggested that through Soltau's relentless use of photographs, and specifically in relation to her *NY Faces* series, the viewer is repeatedly impelled to confront the traumatized and wounded body.

In his psychoanalytic reading of her work, William Ganis suggests that Soltau's photographs are wholly fetishistic, from the tearing and destroying of the picture plane to the puncturing and stitching in which she attempts "a substitute for an irrecoverable reality... The haptic torn edges and threads suggest a maternal, domestic touch."¹⁰¹ I argue that neither Soltau's stitching nor her imagery suggest anything resembling the homely or domestic in these works, although a reference to the feminine may be suggested in the form of a female iconography. Even in this, I suggest it might be one that evokes, for instance, the wounded Saint Apollonia or similar, who clung to her beliefs even under duress.¹⁰² Alternatively, these images might be seen as operating in terms of a trope of 'vagina dentata'; a toothed vagina that might devour or castrate the male, such as a Medusan head.¹⁰³ A Freudian

¹⁰⁰ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, (2000), p. 91.

¹⁰¹ William Ganis, 'String Theories: Annegret Soltau's Transitional Fetishistic Photocollages', *Afterimage*, 36, 4 (Thursday, 1 January 2009), pp. 6-14. A 'maternal touch' might be perceived as evocative of care, whereas Soltau's stitching is rough.
<http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2479/is_4_36/ai_n32064447/> [accessed 21 December 2009]

¹⁰² When Apollonia refused to renounce her faith, her teeth reputedly were smashed, and rather than give in to her torturers she jumped into fire and burned to death.

<http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=104> [accessed 15 June 2010]

¹⁰³ See Freud's essay 'Medusa's Head', (1922), in Sigmund Freud, *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, (New York: Touchstone, Simon and Schuster, 1997), pp. 202-3.

reading might suggest castration or decapitation anxiety, where the hidden genitals of the female are seen to threaten the penis by devouring it. However, rather than attacking male supremacy through what art historian Barbara Rose terms as 'depth psychology' of vaginal iconography in women's art, I contend that Soltau's images come from an investigation of the self via erasure, etching and a direct reference to the body in the form of hair.¹⁰⁴ Although her images are almost entirely reliant on the female body, and much of her work draws on matrilineal aspects of human ecology, in attempting to make sense of these *NY Faces*, they can be seen to engage with, but to signify more than gendered responses to global traumas.

Conclusion

Soltau's photo-stitchings might be seen as spaces of affects, rather than picture planes with organized motifs that appeal primarily to the optical sense. When she pieces together fragments of photographs with thread in her photo-stitchings they appear to be double-sided, and suggestive of quilting. Deleuze and Guattari's exploration of the metamorphosis of patchwork to quilting by seventeenth-century New World settlers offer a possible reading of this process, again in relation to patchwork. They propose that the smooth space of the irregular salvaged scraps of materials of the patchworks becomes correlated with more regular or striated space of the embroidered quilts that the settlers took with them from Europe, in particular when the two were patched together for practical reasons of warmth for everyday usage. For Deleuze and Guattari these forms of quilting provide metaphors for nomadism.

¹⁰⁴ Barbara Rose, 'Vaginal Iconology', in Robinson, (2001), pp. 575-7 (p. 576).

Their concept of nomadism, that is the movement from one point to another in the physical landscape, finds literal and metaphorical echoes in relation to the haptic in Soltau's work; in this instance I am concerned with the haptic thread rather than the haptic space. To quote Deleuze and Guattari, "The life of the nomad is the *intermezzo*."¹⁰⁵ That is to say something that fits or moves as a transition between other more significant spaces or images. By following customary paths, the nomad moves from point to point in a life governed by movement and change, rather than by systems and structures. Soltau's obsession with the haptic line that moves from one concern to the next, beginning with the emphasis on the female form in her earliest over-drawings with pen, and through several changes, develops into a stitched line. My argument is that these stages occur as both a consequence of, and part of, her artistic practice; a practice that, to follow Deleuze's rationale: "works in a space without borders or enclosure."¹⁰⁶ I suggest this is the space of the artist whose work may face censure, but may also stimulate affective responses.

The haptic and nomadic as concepts, as manifest in exploratory probing and experimental strategies of the artist's creativity, might tentatively be seen as related, indeed almost indivisible in Soltau's work. Her binding threads, and stitched and etched lines can also be seen as nomadic, marking points, and connecting fragments on the aesthetic plane, and within her oeuvre. Fragmented and disorganized imagery of the body in the photo-stitchings can be read as random patchwork, as 'smooth' unstructured amorphous spaces. Because the photographs of the body have been torn apart and re-formed within the body outlines in varying arrangements, they can prompt the embodied viewer to acknowledge the possibility of their own vulnerability. Recognition of this, initially through the visual sense, can provoke an

¹⁰⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, (2004b), p. 419.

¹⁰⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, (2004b), p. 420.

uncontrollable involuntary response in spite of ourselves; we are forced to think. Deleuze says: “What forces us to think is the sign.”¹⁰⁷ Artworks such as those in Soltau’s *NY Faces* series are arguably born from this ‘sign’, be it in relation to trauma, the female body and its connections and constraints, or the haptic. In this chapter, Soltau’s framing of hair and its simulacra in etched lines and black threads has been seen to be a repeated reference point in her artistic practices. Through her explorations and manipulation of the self and the female body, I suggest she enables her viewers to revisit this topic through new and sometimes disturbing readings.

¹⁰⁷ Deleuze, (2008), p. 62.

Chapter 4

Mapping Irish Identities and Domesticity: Hair in the Work of Kathy Prendergast and Dorothy Cross

Introduction

“The notion of what is public and what is private, what is inside and what is outside, where the body stops and the communal world begins, has, then been a consistently problematic one in contemporary Irish culture.”¹

“In trying to understand a sense of place, I am also trying to understand what it means to be human.”²

In this chapter Kathy Prendergast's (b. 1958) preoccupation with hair, both literally depicted and metaphorically suggested, will be explored as a key factor in her representations of both personal and public spaces, as well as in her serial strategies of mapping the body and land. This will be investigated particularly in relation to notions of identity, Irishness and domesticity. Correspondences will also be drawn with the work of the Irish artist Dorothy Cross (1956-) who also references hair, and briefly to that of Alice Maher. The chapter will examine four key artworks in which Prendergast uses hair as a material: *The End and The Beginning I and II* (both 1997), and *Love Object* and *Love Table* (both 1999); and two further works *Seabed* (1980) and the series *City Drawings* (1992-2006), in which hair and the body are suggested through strategies of mapping. Prendergast will be shown to use hair in two different ways: sculpturally as a material object, and secondly through association and metaphorical suggestion. As a material that is persistently subject to continual loss and re-growth hair, as a tangible object, will be shown as a possible metaphor for the cyclical qualities of life, but in different ways to that explored by

¹ Fintan O'Toole, 'Private Republics and Public Realms: The Politics of Space in Modern Ireland', in Penelope Curtis, ed. *Strongholds*, exh. cat. (Liverpool: Tate Gallery, 1991), pp. 42-4 (p. 43).

² Yi-Fu Tuan, 'Sense of Place: Its Relationship to Self and Time', in Tom Mels, ed, *Reanimating Places: A Geography of Rhythms*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 45-56 (p. 46).

Annegret Soltau in the previous chapter. It will also be explored as a metaphor for continual passages of migration from Ireland to England during the 1980s in particular.

Informed by written interpretations of historical perceptions of Ireland as a romanticised landscape,³ I will explore the argument that posits ‘woman’ as a metonym for Ireland and some of its utopian ramifications. This chapter will then consider some of the ways that Prendergast’s work might be seen to depict alternative spaces by calling into question these associations. In Chapter Two I explored a historical correlation of ‘woman’ and Ireland in relation to Alice Maher’s work, but in connection with the positioning of the female artist. As in that chapter, my use of the term ‘woman’ here refers to a masculine overarching notion of women, as both a political and socio-cultural, patriarchal historical construct, and, in relation to Prendergast and Cross, particular to Ireland. This notion of ‘woman’ will be briefly discussed in relation to two sometimes interrelated contexts: during colonialism by the British; and as suggesting iterative associations between mythical female figures and Ireland. Prendergast alludes to something of this in a recent interview, when she says, “As you know under British rule, Ireland has been personified as this woman Kathleen Ní Houlihan. So there was always a subtext of the landscape being like a person.”⁴

I shall argue that Prendergast appears to challenge sentimental perceptions of Ireland in her mobilization of practical techniques of sewing and mapping, and her use of domestic objects. Parallels have been highlighted between Prendergast’s work and

³ In particular those of Fintan O’Toole, James M. Smith in Grinnell and Conley, Patrick O’Sullivan, Catherine Nash, and Breda Gray, see Bibliography for details.

⁴ Coline Milliard, ‘Kathy Prendergast in Interview’, *Circa*, 128 (Summer 2009), 42-9 (p. 43).

that of other Irish women artists in their associations between the body and the map, as contributions to the “critical exploration of gender and national identities.”⁵

Prendergast’s work with maps, and her use of domestic objects and hair enables connections with the artistic practices of Dorothy Cross.⁶ In this chapter Cross’s work will be shown to provide a parallel case study through her use of hair in the form of cowhides in relation to spaces of Irishness and ‘woman’. I also consider her art works with jellyfish and the underwater landscape in relation to Prendergast’s maps. I present a more speculative reading in this chapter than in the previous chapters of how these artists frame hair in their work. Whilst Prendergast’s works using hair as a material enables interpretations that can be referenced in terms of specific Irish ideologies, I will argue that her works that draw from maps stimulate in the viewer more conjectural reminders of hair and the body, and this in turn enables more abstract readings and interpretations. Similarly Cross’s works that reference jellyfish will also be shown to stimulate analogies and metaphors of hair, albeit in different dialogues.

Kathy Prendergast was born in Dublin in 1958, and her art school training began there in the mid-1970s, and was completed in the mid-1980s at the Royal College of Art in London.⁷ Whilst continuing to live and work in London, she chooses to have her art represented by a Dublin gallery.⁸ Her work has been described as enigmatic, and this may stem in part from her personal reticence; her Dublin gallery is the point

⁵ Catherine Nash, ‘Editorial’, *Environment and Planning D Society and Space*, 16, (1998), 1-9 (p. 4). Nash, a geographer, has worked with Prendergast on several projects. Nash includes Jane Garland (1962-), Dorothy Cross (1956-) and Anne Tallentire (1949-), in this list.

⁶ Dorothy Cross was born in Cork, studied in Cork, Leicester and San Francisco, and lives and works in Connemara.

⁷ A Master’s degree in Fine Art was not available in Ireland at that time, see Claire Schneider, ‘Kathy Prendergast: Lost Maps ... and other “Limbo” States’, in *0044*, exh. cat. ed. by Peter Murray, (Kinsale: Gandon Editions, 1999), pp. 128-35 (p.129).

⁸ Kerlin Gallery, Anne’s Lane, Dublin.

of contact for the researcher.⁹ In the twenty-first century an artist with no website might be seen as being slightly diffident toward public attention. However, this reserve does not extend to her work, although the time-consuming nature of it produces only intermittent exhibitions, further emphasizing a notion of the inscrutable and enigmatic in her art. It has been said on several occasions that Kathy Prendergast inhabits a unique place in contemporary Irish art. As Aidan Dunne describes it:

“Even at the time of her graduation show, in 1980, it was clear she was an artist with a distinctive imaginative vision and a wide range of abilities...Her work emerged from spells of meditative reflection, with little in the way of tangible results for a long time: not a process, in other words, that would be encouraged in today’s highly structured art education system.”¹⁰

Literature on Prendergast’s art is limited and ranges across themes of a specifically Irish context, the body and loss, and geographical mapping. Although the motif of hair occurs in her work, its conceptual significance has been mentioned only briefly. For example, Francis McKee alludes to it when he draws an analogy between Prendergast’s pencil lines in *City Drawings* (1992-2006, and fine hair-like dendrites.¹¹ Helen Swords, reviewing the same work at an exhibition in 1997 at The Tate Gallery (now Tate Britain), also makes a similar connection: “Tiny cities appear in unique patterns of scattered, frizzy lines like soft hairs with kink in.”¹²

The chapter will begin by examining Irishness as a problematic concept rooted in the idealization of landscape and ‘woman’. I will argue that Prendergast’s art practice subtly draws from a personal and national biographical history as she maps

⁹ Prendergast describes her dealer as someone who “will be there for me when I’m eighty,” Schneider in Murray, (1999), p.129.

¹⁰ Aidan Dunne, ‘Moving From Darkness into Light’, *The Irish Times*, (11 November, 2009).

¹¹ Francis McKee, ‘To Hide in Plain Sight’, in Kathy Prendergast, *Kathy Prendergast: The End and The Beginning*, exh. cat. (London: Merrell Publishers with Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1999), pp. 9-24 (p. 12).

¹² Helen Swords, ‘Kathy Prendergast’, *Circa*, 80, (Summer 1997), 57-8 (p. 57).

emotional ties through her use of the body and hair. I also contend that she utilizes historical applications of scientific knowledge (maps) to evoke alternative conceptions of the relationship between landscape and nature at the end of the twentieth century. My approach in this chapter has been partly informed by cultural geography, particularly the writing of Catherine Nash, and with whom Prendergast collaborated on the projects *Landing*, and *Kathy Prendergast - The Black Map Series*.¹³

Irishness: Ideologies of Land and Woman

Prendergast's work can be seen to draw on various notions of Irishness, including the inter-related issues of landscape, domesticity and diaspora. There has been an artistic legacy in Ireland that has promulgated, together with the issue of migration, ideas of Irishness. During migration from Ireland to England in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries those who left their homeland, with its specific history and culture entered what has historically been seen as the culture of its oppressor, in order to make a new 'home'. In England, the migrant's notions of an Irish 'mother' culture have historically perpetuated myths of Ireland that may only exist in the minds of its diasporic people. If these ideologies of Ireland are founded on cultural myths, then Prendergast's art might enable us to raise questions about mythical connections between the landscape and female sexuality. Lisa Tickner for instance, spoke more than twenty years ago of the visual articulations and specific conditions of

¹³ *Landing* is a Visualizing Geography project developed in the Geography Department at the University of London by Felix Driver, Catherine Nash and Kathy Prendergast, curated by Ingrid Swenson, and funded by The Arts and Humanities Research Board, see *Landing: Eight Collaborative Projects Between Artists + Geographers*, ed. by Swenson, and others, (London: Royal Holloway, 2002). The exhibition *Kathy Prendergast - The Black Map Series* was held by the arts charity Peer, London in 2010.

production of 'ideological components'.¹⁴ With regard to ideologies of Ireland, these might be seen to operate within (what Tickner refers to as the 'signifying practices' of) the institutions of nation and 'woman'.¹⁵ These include the state and its associations with wealthy business and landowners, and the Church, and through discourses that revolve around the material circumstances of both, continually emphasising and contesting meanings. Tickner claims:

"This setting-into-place of the subject is simultaneously secured through the harnessing of the sexual drives and their forms of gratification (fetishism, voyeurism, identificatory processes, pleasure in recognition and repetition). The breaking of these circuits, these processes of coherence that help secure the subject to and in ideology, becomes a central task for artists working...on the politics of representation."¹⁶

Migration has played such a large part in the history of Ireland that its shores, according to Fintan O'Toole, are permeable membranes through which pass people, culture and capital.¹⁷ Ireland as an island is also suggestive of an unfixed entity since it is divided from part of itself, Ulster from Éire, and internally the East was seen to be isolated from the West. Dublin and the East facing to Europe, (in particular England), gave ready access to an influx of colonial powers from the sixteenth century onwards. With subjugation of Ireland to England came the loss of the Gaelic language, until only the West of Ireland was seen as the "locus of the real Ireland ...untainted by the British influence."¹⁸ The West, with its dramatic landscapes, poverty and inaccessibility provided a stimulus to ferment an ideology circling around concepts of nation and communities as well as the visual landscape.¹⁹

¹⁴ Lisa Tickner, 'Modernist Art History: The Challenge of Feminism (1988)', in Robinson, (2001), pp. 250-7 (pp. 251-2).

¹⁵ Lisa Tickner, 'Sexuality and/in Representation: Five British Artists (1985)', in Robinson, (2001), pp. 460-74 (p.461), note 2.

¹⁶ Tickner in Robinson, p. 461.

¹⁷ O'Toole, in Curtis, (1991), p. 43.

¹⁸ O'Toole, in Curtis, (1991), p. 44.

¹⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London and New York: Verso, 1991), is a useful text for its definitions of nation and community.

These West of Ireland landscapes were captured or re-imagined by Irish artists in the early twentieth century, the best known of which are male, and who drew from an “iconography of the West as an archetypal Irish landscape.”²⁰ This was also a time when the Irish suffrage movement was questioning the political role of women, and according to Nash, paintings such as Paul Henry’s *The Potato Diggers* (1912) [Figure 4.1] and *The Watcher* (1914) [Figure 4.2] supposedly help fix a perception of Irish women within the space of rural nature. Henry seems to epitomize in his work an image of Ireland that included a simple landscape of sky, land, sea and cottages. In these spaces women function as depictions of wholesome domesticity, far removed from political arenas, or from more seductive images of women in Western art. The red skirts of the woman gazing out over the sea in *The Watcher* and those of the two women in *The Potato Diggers* can, according to Nash, “be understood in the context of the cultural and biological role which was afforded to women of the West.”²¹ Henry and his contemporaries were also following a wider art historical legacy from Britain and Europe of depicting peasant life. As art historian Adele Dalsimer argues, “this association of women with nature gave rural poverty an acceptable face and used the farm woman’s backbreaking toil to sublimate her destiny and translate it into the sphere of religious piety.”²² This was particularly applicable to Ireland with its strong religious representations.

²⁰ For instance, Seán Keating (1889-1977), Paul Henry (1876-1958), Seán O’ Sullivan (1906-64), and Maurice Wilks (1910- 84). Catherine Nash, ‘Remapping and Renaming: New Cartographies of Identity, Gender and Landscape in Ireland’, *Feminist Review*, 44, (Summer 1993), 39-57 (p. 45).

²¹ Nash, (Summer 1993), pp. 46-7. Nash explains that red symbolized an affiliation to the ancient costumes over the lure of ‘modern’ fashion.

²² *Visualizing Ireland: National Identity and The Pictorial Tradition*, ed. by Adele M Dalsimer, (Boston and London: Faber and Faber, 1993), p. 11.

The cottage also became a traditional Irish socio-cultural symbol.²³ It marked an Irish home from a British one architecturally and socially, as well as representing “the realization, both in the physical fabric of the landscape and in the moral and spiritual domain, of the ideal form of Irish society.”²⁴ Neutralizing the threat of a feminist uprising by locating women in terms of the home and as mothers of the Irish race, the metaphor of the cottage also provided an idealized image of Irish life appropriated by those in power in Dublin as well as those living in urban poverty. More than that, it provided a conflated ideology of Ireland the land, and ‘woman’ and her place in Irish history, through patriarchal discourses.

Ideological spaces of ‘woman’ associated with both land and home might then be understood in the terms of the philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who has explored the psychic and poetic meanings of the home as spaces of intimacy. The complexity of these spaces may lie in both their physical locations withdrawn from the active gaze of a masculine world, and also in the intimacy of women’s thoughts and domestic actions. To paraphrase Bachelard, imagination can be ‘the retreat of the soul’²⁵ and, I suggest, a place where renegotiation of identity can occur. Whether as ‘other’ in associations and dualisms including ‘woman’ and nature or Ireland and England, the intimacy of the female body historically has been manipulated and mobilized. The poet Seamus Heaney, in evoking the relationship between Ireland and England, also depicts Ireland as vulnerable and female:

“Your back is a firm line of eastern coast
And arms and legs are thrown

²³ Kathy Prendergast created a bronze cottage titled *Little House* in 2007. See <<http://www.kerlin.ie/artists/Kathy-Prendergast.aspx>> [accessed 10 August 2011] Alice Maher also made *Thorn House* (1995).

²⁴ Nash, (Summer 1993), p. 49.

²⁵ Bachelard’s theories of ‘home’ inform my understanding of this notion of intimacy. Bachelard, (1994), p. 137.

Beyond your gradual hill. I caress
 The heaving province where our past has grown.
 I am the tall kingdom over your shoulder
 That you would neither cajole nor ignore...

And I am still imperially
 Male, leaving you with the pain,
 The rending process in the colony."²⁶

Ailbhe Smyth, writing in 1991 (at the time of the election of the first Irish female president Mary Robinson), suggests that 'woman' and land are perceived as the same, when she says, "It is not true, of course, that Woman has no place in Ireland. The truth is that Irish Woman is place itself."²⁷ For Smyth, men and women are differently positioned. Where men are seen to wrestle with questions of nationality, oppression and colonization, Smyth sees women as doubly vulnerable. She argues that they similarly contend with issues of nation and colonization, but they are also subject to material oppression by men, as regards their lack of right to information and jurisdiction over their own bodies.²⁸

Where Smyth describes how historically 'woman' has been constructed as a "silent suffering symbol, vestal virgin of nation, faith and family,"²⁹ Celtic scholar Proinsias Mac Cana suggests a concept of 'woman' that was constructed in Irish mythologies in an unshakeable association with the land and its sovereignty. In considering both the physical and the abstract, Mac Cana writes how land/'woman' reacted to how she was husbanded. If the land was ruled with integrity, then it could flourish, if not, it could become barren. In Celtic goddess myths the suitor who consented to kiss the hag becomes King, and she regains her youth and power. Although she depended on a worthy young man for her regeneration, the decision of the hag/goddess figure held

²⁶ From the poem 'Act of Union', in Séamus Heaney, *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), pp. 127-8.

²⁷ Ailbhe Smyth, in Curtis, (1991), p. 45.

²⁸ Smyth is referring here in particular to abortion and divorce debates.

²⁹ Smyth, in Curtis, (1991), p. 46.

sway. Indeed the goddess Ériu, an eponym for Éire/Ireland, is said to have given her name to the land. According to the mythology, in so doing, she gives herself and the two become one.³⁰

What emerges from this discussion is that Irish patriarchal hegemonies, disseminated through mythology and more recent histories, can be seen to place 'woman' as a fluid and reworked concept, adapted to support changing ideologies. Yet paramount to this is the acceptance of the notion of Ireland as 'an essentially female race'.³¹

Whilst 'woman' becomes a metaphor for, or personification of, a utopian perception of Ireland, these same qualities are also in conflict with masculine ideologies of the male. In this way relationships between 'woman' and land, man and woman, power and passivity, appear to be constantly balancing and rebalancing, as subjects in process. As Catherine Nash writes, the connections between "the political control of landscape and territory and the control of female sexuality" have been particularly rich themes for the artist to mine.³²

Where, for instance, Henry conflated women and landscape reflecting current masculine ideologies, this chapter examines how some contemporary female artists, including Prendergast and Dorothy Cross, challenge these ideologies through their mobilisations of the physical body (including hair).³³ Cross was born and studied in

³⁰ Proinsias Mac Cana, 'Women in Irish Mythology', *The Crane Bag*, 4, 1, (1980), 7-11 (p. 10). Mac Cana explains that in legend the 'feminine element' tends to dominate in literature about the landscape, for instance, The Paps of Anu on the borders of Cork and Kerry are named after "the mother of the Irish Gods" See also in the same issue Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, 'Women in Early Irish Myths and Sagas', 12-19.

³¹ Nash, (Summer 1993), p. 41.

³² Catherine Nash, 'Gender and Landscape in Ireland, 1993', in Fintan Cullen, ed. *Sources in Irish Art: A Reader*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), pp. 302-8 (p. 302).

³³ Apart from Dorothy Cross, whose work I discuss at various points throughout this chapter, Irish artist Pauline Cummins also uses cartographic images mapped over the human body in her performance, *Untitled* (1988-91), while Frances Hegarty's videos *Gold* and *Turas* (both 1995),

Cork, before moving to England and then San Francisco to complete her artistic training. She currently lives and works in Connemara, Ireland, and has exhibited her work regularly in galleries in Ireland, England and America, as well as appearing in innumerable group exhibitions worldwide. She also uses video and has worked on large-scale outdoor productions and installations, which often reference or are located at sea.³⁴ However, it is her artworks created during the 1990s, and which I explore later, that are the most relevant to this discussion of hair, particularly those using cowhide. They make reference to cultural history and identity, and to perceptions of woman's ambiguous role as both nurturer (like the beasts of the field), and also as a gendered object of desire. As Cheryl Smyth notes, these sculptures work "to resignify the power relations between men and women."³⁵

In the installation *Seabed* (1980) [Figure 4.3], Prendergast maps landscape onto the female body. Nash warns that it may be difficult "to pay attention to the contexts of artistic production and the politics of identity without reading artists' work too easily through the frames of their biography and cultural location."³⁶ This may certainly be the case in *Seabed* where the emerging artist, only part-way through her artistic 'training'³⁷, has produced an artwork that appears to directly reference herself biographically and culturally.³⁸ *Seabed* consists of a nude female 'island' recumbent on a simple bed. Beside her is a small, covered table with a 'still life' of vase and

explore issues of colonisation carried out by Irish people, and separation from the maternal body through emigration and loss of the 'Mother tongue'. See Deepwell, (2005).

³⁴ For instance *Ghostship* (1999), *Chiasm* (1999), and *Medusae* (2002), made with her brother Tom Cross. See Dorothy Cross, ed. by Enrique Juncosa, and others, (Dublin and Milan: Irish Museum of Modern Art and Charta, 2005) pp.126-137 for a fuller list of works and exhibitions.

³⁵ Cheryl Smyth, *Bad Girls*, exh. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1993), p. 6.

³⁶ Catherine Nash, 'Mapping Emotion: Longing and Location in the Work of Kathy Prendergast', in Fintan Cullen and John Morrison, eds. *A Shared Legacy: Essays on Irish and Scottish Art and Visual Culture*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 225-53 (pp. 229-230).

³⁷ I use the term training here with some hesitation as art education can itself be considered a problematic notion.

³⁸ We know from the artist that she was reading a lot of Irish poetry around the time she was formulating and making this piece. See John McBratney, 'Something More Exciting Than Ordinary Living: The Art of Kathy Prendergast', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, 13, (1997), 180-87 (p. 185).

flowers, and cup and saucer. Over these, the artist has mapped and written a landscape in paint and poetry. An exchange between the inner and outer body is evoked where colouration, contour lines and symbols reminiscent of mapping strategies, now speak of veins and arteries, kneecaps and body fluids. Nash's point that Prendergast "borrows the symbols for woodland to indicate hair,"³⁹ echoes Johann Herder's metaphor for hair as the 'sacred grove',⁴⁰ as well as the complex issues that surround body hair in historical, sociological, and feminist discourses.⁴¹ The pubic hair on the female body here (which Prendergast represents by woodland), can be seen to draw on a long tradition of ambiguous representations of the complex and thorny question of the female pudenda.⁴² In 'Western' cultural traditions representations of the female body demanded that the genitals were hidden, but in doing so the smooth lines and curve of the belly were interrupted behind pubic hair. In Freudian theory, however, the hidden female genitals signify castration and lack, and the pubic hair becomes a site of fetishism and subtle eroticism. From the middle of the twentieth century in Western culture, what had been a minority interest in the removal of the pubic hair (in erotic terms as acts of submission and dominance) became more widespread. Pubic hair was removed for cosmetic reasons to achieve physical homogeny.⁴³ By transforming its removal into a commodity process, pubic and body hair again becomes a contested site of dis/empowerment.

³⁹ Nash, in Cullen, (2005), p. 230.

⁴⁰ Herder, (2002), p. 66. See also Chapter 2 of this thesis.

⁴¹ In one recent collection of essays on the taboo of body hair, contributor Louise Tondeur investigates the potential starting points for a thesis on the topic of pubic hair, while Alice Macdonald suggests that in film, "when body hair is represented on a naked woman, it is usually used to signify something derogatory." Respectively - Louise Tondeur, 'A History of Pubic Hair, or Reviewer's Responses to Terry Eagleton's *After Theory*', and Alice Macdonald, 'Hair on the Lens: Female Body Hair on the Screen', both in *The Last Taboo: Women and Body Hair* ed. by Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006) pp. 48-65 and 66-82 respectively.

⁴² The word pudenda derives from the Latin *pudēre* - to be ashamed.

⁴³ Jack Sargeant, 'Revealing and Concealing: Observation on Eroticism and Female Pubic Hair', in Biddle-Perry, and Cheang, (2008), pp. 43-53 (p. 52).

Prendergast's positioning of the woodland symbol in *Seabed* enables mythical correlations between woods and the pubic area as places of ambiguity and mystery, the former a theme that also runs through Rijkeboer and Maher's work. The significance of the woodland symbol in *Seabed* could also be seen as a metaphor of the Irish countryside as an ideological space, a space of leisure and pleasure for the wealthy, but poverty and hardship for those who live and work it. It conceivably becomes a place through which to move and explore, and implies a reading of the female body as a site of submission and objectification.⁴⁴ Prendergast's strategies with hair in *Seabed* might be open to accusations of conventionalizing the female body in its conflation with nature, as it also appears to be denied a more general notion of human animation and thus a perceived superiority over nature. In *Seabed* 'woman' appears insentient. Although not seeming to comment directly on feminist issues in this work, Prendergast's landscaping of the whole installation stimulates a complex range of questions and issues about female embodiment.

The figure is located in a corner, and writing as if the artist herself is speaking, barrister and art enthusiast John McBratney notes, "The thing that strikes me about *Seabed* now is that it was really about someone being isolated or being solitary."⁴⁵ Although this statement may give us a glimpse into Prendergast's state of mind when she made this work, it is purely conjectural and does not limit further interpretations of the installation. By locating *Seabed* in a corner, the female may be seen as resting in a space of seclusion, something Bachelard claims; "ensures us one of the things

⁴⁴ Further reading on this point might include Dalsimer, (1993), and Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art*, (New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 1999). Landscape continues to be a key issue in art practice in the twenty-first century, as evidenced by a Seminar Series on Art and Environmental Change at Triarc (Trinity College Dublin Irish Arts Research Centre) beginning June 2010.

⁴⁵ McBratney, (1997), p. 185.

we prize most highly - immobility.”⁴⁶ As a space between total inclusion and total seclusion, he sees its liminal position as providing a space to ‘be’.

Where clothing or bed linen might offer protection, the landscape appears to have engulfed not only the body, but also the location of the female. Both a domestic and a public scene, the sparsely furnished space of the installation and lack of covers on the bed may speak of material lack, although the presence of cloth, flowers and teacup counter this in the way they can be seen to signal a physical and aesthetic sustenance of both body and soul. The recumbent figure conjures other images including historic effigies on tomb chests, on which a series of religious iconographic symbols map the socio-historic significance of, for instance, a Knight or Lady. Although Prendergast has not acknowledged a debt to art from earlier periods, *Seabed* also recalls an art historical tradition of nude painting, including works such as Alexandre Cabanel’s *The Birth of Venus* (1863) [Figure 4.4].⁴⁷ In this painting a female nude reclines on the sea, (at one with it, as Prendergast’s female appears to be with the land) with the cherubs above heralding her awakening from her watery home. Her hair spreads out mimicking the waves, in an idiom not dissimilar to that Prendergast employs to simulate hair with symbols for woodland.

Whilst common mapping symbols are familiar to many, part of the reception of a map or artwork arguably lies in a willingness and ability of its audience to decode certain signs and symbols, for instance, in iconographical, political and socio-cultural contexts. I would argue that Prendergast gives us similar clues on how to read *Seabed*. By including the table and its contents, we may understand some importance is placed on, or questions are raised about, issues of the everyday for women in the

⁴⁶ Bachelard, (1994), p. 137.

⁴⁷ Alexandre Cabanel (1823-1889).

home.⁴⁸ Lines of poetry over the figure might also be seen to refer directly to the work of Seamus Heaney (1939-), whose poetry, amongst others, Prendergast was reading at the time of making this work.⁴⁹ Born in Mossbawn, near Castledawson in Northern Ireland, Heaney saw all the developments in his life as dependent on his first migration from there. He takes this theme in *Digging*, a poem about his father working on the land, of which the last two stanzas emphasize the dislocation from his traditional Irish roots to another medium:

“The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I’ve no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I’ll dig with it.”⁵⁰

Just as Heaney’s pen and his father and grandfather’s spades before that became their metaphysical tools of choice, I suggest Prendergast reveals in *Seabed* her inclination towards an artistic strategy of mapping. While Heaney uses the pen, she uses her art practice to comment on the spaces of female identity, and whilst engaging with issues associated with movement including migration and dislocation, she also appears to reference spaces where ‘woman’ can be still.

In a parallel with Prendergast’s art, Dorothy Cross’s work also references space in relation to interactions between the private and public body, and Penelope Curtis interprets this to some extent as Cross’s preoccupation with a gender balance. Just as

⁴⁸ Jane Humpries, ‘(Re) Writing the Domestic into the Everyday’, *Familiar but Unknown-Irish Women Artists and Artisans: Methods and Methodologies of Recovery and Remembering*, Symposium held at Triarc, Dublin, 17 October 2009. Podcast available at <<http://www.triarc.ie>> [accessed 1 June 2010]

⁴⁹ McBratney, (1997), p. 183.

⁵⁰ Seamus Heaney, ‘Digging’, *Opened Ground*, (1998), p. 3. (Originally part of the anthology *Death of a Naturalist*, 1966).

Irish constructions of 'woman' appear as norms, Curtis suggests that Cross's work emphasizes, "that we are heavily conventionalized, and that space is heavily sexed."⁵¹ In the photographic prints *Mantegna and Crucifix* (1996) [Figure 4.5]⁵² Cross depicts, on the right, a naked female lying prostrate and, on the left, a crucifix with a raised outline of the body, allusive to Christ rising from the cross. The female lies on what appears to be a steel mortuary-like slab, with her feet towards the viewer, and the upper body increasingly out of focus. Deep shadows between the thighs lead our gaze toward the dark pubic hair and emphasize the insecurity of the intimate space of femininity. Cross's imagery suggests a gendered landscape, where the viewer's gaze, encouraged to move up to and over the pubis, is in effect allowed to define female identity through understandings of sexuality.⁵³ This work also raises issues around sexuality and religion through the close proximity to the religious icon of the adjacent cross, with its additional pun on the artist's name, and Warner reads the cruciform shape of the pubis as "mirroring the absent figure of Christ".⁵⁴

Prendergast and Cross's representations of the female body initially appear as passive inert beings, but symbolism in the former and analogies found in the latter suggest several possible meanings. Although very different visual representations of the female, both artists can be seen to interrogate the female body through their horizontal and landscapist depictions, where hair as metaphor for Prendergast, and as

⁵¹ Curtis, (1991), p. 9.

⁵² This piece brings together into a diptych the two photographic works: *Mantegna* (1995) and *Crucifix* (1996). See Dorothy Cross, *Even: Dorothy Cross*, exh. cat. (Bristol: Arnolfini, 1996).

⁵³ There are reminders of Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde* (1866), in Cross's representation of the female in *Mantegna and Crucifix* (1996). Differences between the cultural frameworks of the two artworks however, encourages very different interpretations. *L'Origine du Monde* was painted for Khalil-Bey, a collector of erotic art, and almost a century later bought by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and his wife, who had doors fitted to cover the artwork. See Sargeant in Biddle-Perry and Cheang, (2008), pp. 47-8. Cross's work is more ambiguous and less overt in its sexual reference.

⁵⁴ Marina Warner, in Juncosa, (2005), p. 26.

part of the body for Cross, can be shown to be significant in their responses to 'woman' and land.

Hair and Women's Time

In *The End and The Beginning 1 and 11*, *Love Object* and *Love Table*, Prendergast conceivably deploys hair for the power of its material properties. In these works her practices with it as a remnant of the body enable reflections on the vulnerability of the palpable self. In these four pieces, the artist turns to sculptural representations that suggest female identity through more literal and personal reminders, in particular those associated with the home and the everyday. This connection to domesticity points to the complex and often contradictory notions associated with 'woman'. The objects themselves in *The End and The Beginning 1 and 11*, *Love Object* and *Love Table*, of bonnet, sewing reel, brush and comb, table and chair respectively, evoke images of the home, of babies, sewing, family meals and domesticity. In other words, by using such objects, issues of caring and nurture are evoked, issues which are often implicit in the patriarchal stereotyping of women's lives. Since a primary function of the female is nurture of the unborn child within the womb, stereotyping also contains within it these real experiences, thus making possible readings of the works even more complex. Women are not only stereotyped as being the key agents for domestic issues, but are seen to carry out that role as they also challenge it.

Fine details in these works draw the audience close to the pieces, as do the complex layers of referral. By assembling clues both from visual suggestions within the art works and from the artist's occasional statements about her work, it is possible to extract inferences to larger philosophical dialogues of identity in relation to

male/female debates. In short, Prendergast's visual practice during the 1990s might tentatively be seen amongst other things to explore this issue, within which both the material and suggestion of hair plays a significant part as a symbol of the body. By analyzing Prendergast's deployment of hair in these four works, I shall explore how woman might be, or has been, represented as a subject within the home.

A small bonnet such as that in *The End and The Beginning 1* (1997) [Figure 4.6] evokes associations with the very young (particularly girls) whose heads having little or no hair require protection. The earliest clothes of a child may hold deep significance and personal memories as reminders of birth, or even death.

Prendergast's bonnet is exhibited in a display case, suggesting its importance as a keepsake and, rather than being confined to a special place in the home, perhaps concealed or forgotten about, is brought into full view. The random single hairs Prendergast has threaded into the fabric remind us of our embodied vulnerability; they suggest punishment rites such as scalping, and even possible allusions to the more recent conflict in Ireland during what was colloquially known as The Troubles.⁵⁵ The ambiguous relationship between the sparse and straggly frailty of the hair with the bonnet can also be seen to confuse generational identity; we may ask if it belonged to a child or an aged and shrivelled ancestor. In addition, it hints at death. As Barthes says in his meditation on photography; "clothing is perishable, it makes a second grave for the loved being."⁵⁶ As a poignant trace of the body, the bonnet with hair suggests reliquaries of saints, or anthropological artefacts. Identity thus appears as dis/located and unfixed.

⁵⁵ The period known as The Troubles in Northern Ireland began during the late 1960s and continued up to and beyond the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

⁵⁶ Barthes, (2000), p. 64.

Dorothy Cross's work with hair has also suggested some complex gendered meanings. She uses cowhides rather than human hair, as she references the female body in a series of artworks incorporating udders and teats. The hairiness of the animal skin in *Virgin Shroud* (1993) [Figure 4.7], contests our perceptions of, and preferences for, the smooth skin of the female body; this alternative skin is suggestive of other more visceral meanings or locations of the female.⁵⁷ Cowhide reminds us of the death of the corporeal body. In this conflation of the female with a beast of the field, Cross can be seen to raise concerns about contradictions in how 'woman's nature has been perceived; wild, or tamed. It may not be clear what Cross intends by this work, but her placing of her grandmother's wedding train under the cowhide locates the piece within a human context and her own ancestral lineage, suggesting such slippages as those I outline above. *Virgin Shroud* also evokes aspects of women's identity in Ireland that historically have been founded in religion, including the iconic status of Mary within traditions of Marian imagery and shrines within the Irish landscape. One of Mary's roles was in offering succour, and Cross's assemblage emphasizes woman's biological function of giving milk and mothering, although the mysterious and anonymous figure of *Virgin Shroud* contradicts traditional representations of a nurturing Mother. In Hinduism, for instance, the cow is seen as symbolic of life, and like ideologies of the female body, also signifies nurture. Onto this hidden female body Cross arguably maps other diverse and often contradictory symbols. Wedding dresses symbolically mark the passage from one state to another of the female body; they can represent a defining moment of femininity moving from chastity to maternity, and the flow of a veil might be seen to symbolise weeping and the flow of tears. The cowhide with teats

⁵⁷ Dorothy Cross began this series of cowhide works after seeing a traditional sieve made from a stretched cow's udder at a museum in Norway in 1990. She alludes to the connection Freud made between the penis and the nipple, and their ability to act as substitutes for one another. See Cross, (1996), p. 16.

similarly might symbolize a moment when in gendered terms 'woman' becomes 'mother'. However, this 'sacred cow' bridal figure seems to defy normative relationships as Cross crowns her with an upturned udder reminiscent of devil's horns. Cross says of the work: "It is often about breaking a line of inheritance, cutting the cords. But what is terrifying is a repetition that's not transformative, an act of return that leaves everything the same."⁵⁸ Cross's juxtaposition of the materials of cowhide and wedding dress therefore might be seen to contest historic and generational expectations of 'woman' that in the end may not come to fruition. As Prendergast does in *Seabed*, Cross situates *Virgin Shroud* in a corner, with the corresponding implications of isolation and detachment.

In *The End and The Beginning 11* (1997) [Figure 4.8], Prendergast again makes reference to generational time and identity in a sewing bobbin wrapped with hair from her mother, son and herself. At just over five centimetres high, the reel demands close attention from the viewer to notice subtle rhythms and loose ends of different coloured hairs. Sewing reels are often found as part of the domestic workings of a home, and this and the diminutive scale of the work is suggestive of the intimate spaces of the home and its occupants. The body is concentrated in strands of hair, each of which contains the DNA of different generations. This in turn could be seen as a metaphorical mapping of actual landscapes of communities and countryside. Communities within both can be broken down into units, including those structured by race, ethnicity, gender, location or family, the last being the most personal in terms of the body and its genetic histories. The space of the family is seen as the domestic space of home; and Bachelard underlines possible correlations

⁵⁸ Cross quoted by Warner, in Juncosa, (2005), p. 30.

to landscape when he says: "It would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being."⁵⁹

Intriguingly, *The End and The Beginning 11* comes in an edition of three, indirectly suggesting that the artist has created individual copies of this shared ancestral line for each generational member in the 'tree'. Generational change can also be indicative of cyclical change, of birth, growth and death, and indeed, Prendergast has mentioned it as one of the most important pieces of work for her because of its visualization of the relationships to her mother and her children, and the cyclical nature of life.⁶⁰

When time is examined in relation to hair, it can be measured scientifically by growth (approximately 150cm a year), but because a head of hair contains every stage of growth it is simultaneously in a continual cycle with death and renewal.

McKee's suggestion that these natural processes give Prendergast's work "an unforced resonance," implies that she works with nature rather than against it.⁶¹

Familial connections, and cyclical patterns of life are suggested in both *The End and The Beginning 1* and *11* in the inexorable passage of time. Soft downy hair represented in an ambiguous context, such as Prendergast does with the bonnet, evokes both the ageing process and the presence of each generation in those before and after. There are also possible references here to the Christian Trinity, often depicted as three interlocking circles, or, as in Maher's braids in *Keep*, three plaited tresses of hair. By wrapping hair from three heads around three spools, Prendergast creates what could be seen as a familial unity of physical, rather than heavenly, bodies.

⁵⁹ Bachelard, (1994), p. xxxvi.

⁶⁰ Milliard, (Summer 2009), p. 44.

⁶¹ Prendergast, (1999), p. 23.

Diaspora and Domesticity

Kathy Prendergast moved from Ireland to England in the 1980s during a period of intense migration or diaspora. Mary J Hickman, Professor of Irish Studies and Sociology at London Metropolitan University offers two definitions for diaspora; her first, more traditional interpretation suggests it is produced by “coercive uprooting and unsettlement.”⁶² Her second interpretation relies on a broader postmodern definition, as “expressing modes of ‘hybrid’ consciousness and identity,” and it is this second definition that I wish to make use of here.⁶³ This description of diaspora enables a sense of the artist’s Irish roots and nationhood as being outside or separate to England. Sociologist Avtar Brah names this type of space as a ‘diaspora-space’, which is simultaneously local and global.⁶⁴ In other words, a diaspora-space may be worldwide in terms of possible migration between countries, yet is local to the lived space of the host country and also to that of the original culture and nation. So, is it possible to trace how this dispersive tension plays out in Prendergast’s work in relation to identity, hair and domesticity?

Art historian Richard Meyer explains how identity can be made visible in art historical terms; “In contemporary usage, the term ‘identity’ suggests that individuals recognize themselves through a shared condition or quality.”⁶⁵ During the twentieth

⁶² Mary J Hickman, ‘Migration and Diaspora’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed. by Joe Cleary and Claire Connelly, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 117-36 (p. 118).

⁶³ Hickman, in Cleary and Connelly, (2005), p. 118.

⁶⁴ Although Brah focuses on Asia as a ‘diaspora-space’, I find this term suitable for transferral to Irish migration to England. See Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁶⁵ Richard Meyer, ‘Identity’, in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. by Robert Nelson and Richard Shiff, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 2003), pp. 345-57 (p. 345). This statement shares

century social movements enabled questions to be asked about the stability of identity, and where it might act as a marker of inclusion and exclusion. Through disparity rather than similarity, identity became increasingly designated through racial, gendered, global and cultural terms. In art history this led to an opening up of new and diverse topics and themes in academic scholarship, often highlighting issues of identity that oppose accepted norms, and referencing individuals in alternative ways. Identity has come to be seen as flexible, fragmented and inherently complex.⁶⁶ Prendergast could be described as Irish, as a woman, a migrant, an artist, through religion, or any combination of these, and none simply secured. Meyer like Brah sees identity as a complex dialectic. For him identity is “more than a question of visibility and affirmation, more than a matter of presence and empowerment,” it is also a refusal of that form of presence.⁶⁷ Identity may also contain the aspiration to be seen as something more or other, and impossible to define or stabilize, even if that is considered desirable. Judith Butler’s sustained interrogation of how identity and subjectivity are formed is also pertinent to my investigation into Kathy Prendergast’s mapping of identity and dislocation. Butler argues for the subject as being in a state of becoming; in a reiterative process where identity is an action performatively constructed.⁶⁸ Can Prendergast’s artworks explored in this chapter be seen as actions that inform constructions of a diasporic identity? Might her *Seabed*, or Dorothy Cross’s *Virgin Shroud* also be understood as artistic visualizations of diaspora: that

some similar thinking with that of Iris M. Young (whose writing I reference in Chapter 2), although Young considers the issue specifically through gender, see Young, (Spring 1994), 713-738.

⁶⁶ Much has been written about identity as a topic, and there are several useful essays, for instance, Ann duCille, ‘Black Barbie and the Deep Play of Difference’, (pp. 337-49), Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Construction: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, (pp. 392-402), Donna Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the late Twentieth Century’, (pp. 475-97), Elizabeth Grosz, ‘Bodies-Cities’, (pp. 507-14), Janet Wolff, ‘Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics’, (pp. 414-26), all in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. by Amelia Jones, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁶⁷ Meyer, in Nelson and Shiff, (1996), p. 356.

⁶⁸ See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 2, 225, 234.

is, through expressions of hybridity between 'woman' and land, or the complex hybridity of human nature? In post-colonial readings of hybridity, rather than being understood as a simple merging of species or characteristics, it has been theorized as a third space. Gen Doy argues that empowerment: "allows subjects to play with identities, reconstruct themselves and destroy stereotypes."⁶⁹ In this way the individual continuously negotiates and constructs a fluid identity in relation to cultural differences.

Inscribing identity for a white Irish woman in England may entail fitting into or around the host identity within social structures in which the Irish migrant (in England) is perceived as being an 'insider' racially, but culturally as an 'outsider'.⁷⁰ Prendergast's domestic theme of a table and chair in *Love Table* (1999) [Figure 4.9], might be seen as exploring this theme. The upholstery of the chair on the seat and back is stitched with fine hairs, in a similar sparsity to those in *The End and The Beginning 1*. Under the table on the front side facing the chair, thick wild tresses hang centrally and around the two front legs. Although a deceptively simple installation, *Love Table* resonates with symbolic and interpretative possibilities. We are reminded of the screening of domestic spaces in the hanging tresses and, in other ways, of the abject body.⁷¹ When hair escapes and separates from unstable corporeal boundaries in sites away from the body it becomes both detritus and interrupted

⁶⁹ Gen Doy, *Black Visual Culture: Modernity and Postmodernity*, (London and New York: I B Tauris, 2000), p. 134. Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, and Stuart Hall amongst others have all examined racial theories of hybridity. See Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (London: Verso, 1993), and Hall's 'New Ethnicities' in 'Race', *Culture and Difference*, ed. by James Donald and Ali Rattansi, (London: Sage, 1992), pp. 252-9.

⁷⁰ Breda Gray proposes this concept in "'Whitely Scripts" and Irish Women's Radicalized Belonging(s)', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 5, 3, (August, 2002). Her research was principally conducted in the responses of women migrating from Ireland to Luton and London during the 1980s. The Irish female migrant then was predominantly white, which fitted with racial perceptions of England as a 'white' country.

⁷¹ See Julia Kristeva, (1982), and my earlier discussions of the abject and abjection.

living growth. Identity appears to be diverted from that which seems to be substantive and fixed through accepted norms of the body (but is in reality subject to change and degradation), to bodily taboos.⁷² Although this work has a solid physical presence, to sit at this table would entail coming into contact with dense flows of hair, an experience evocative of the fairytale of Bluebeard. Sitting on the chair could also be disturbing because the fragility of the stitching evokes reminders of the vulnerability of the body and identity.

The chair and table also come together as a natural pairing (like the brush and comb in *Love Object* [Figure 4.10]), and both works might be read as metaphors of relationships. In *Love Table* matters of writing and language, or eating and drinking are indirectly referenced, and rely on associations to embodied actions. Tables can be places for receiving sustenance, conducting negotiations, or private spaces for contemplation or creation. Apart from personal or familial relationships, I suggest that connections between the chair and table hint at issues of colonialism, migration and diaspora. The dense seemingly unmanageable hair below the table could be associated with historic perceptions of the 'wild Irish', which colonizing forces deemed as requiring taming. These symbolic tresses of hair also hold semi-erotic overtones, suggesting more sensual images through their tactility, here in a domestic space of intimacy, skewing 'woman' as homemaker by recasting her in a myriad of contentious ways. Associated with a composite of moral elements, long untied hair on a woman can symbolize both moral looseness and natural sensuality, or as Synnott bluntly says "unrestrained sexuality."⁷³ Images of women and their work are suggested in the stitching of the upholstery and the hair hanging from the table; sewing reminds us of the physical immobility of the seamstress or embroiderer in the

⁷² A useful selection of essays on this topic can be found in Lesnik-Oberstein, (2006).

⁷³ Synnott, (September 1987), p. 381.

spaces of the home.⁷⁴ Its counterpart is conceivably visible in the chair where the hairs are reduced in intensity; they have been purposely singled out and relocated by Prendergast. These fragile individual hairs lose much of the essential characteristics of hair as a multiplicitous mass, through their separation from the 'mother body', in this instance the tress, or, in diasporic terms, from Ireland. Apart from questions of power and colonization, other issues of identity and migration can be seen to resonate through the work. Nowhere does Prendergast's work suggest a superiority of chair over table or the reverse, but it is worthwhile to consider that a chair is always drawn up to a table and not usually the reverse. A table can be a place of stasis around which we gather, and from where we disperse. Here, potential symbolic relationships between, and meanings around, the table and chair might also be seen in diasporic terms as analogous to alliances and disconnections between Ireland and England.

Correlations can also be drawn between the tresses of hair in *Love Table* and the loose tresses of Alice Maher's *Ombre* (1997) [Figure 4.11].⁷⁵ Ambiguity in the drawn hair in *Ombre* enables simultaneous readings of both an image of woman as silhouette, and a single enormous tress of hair, with allusions to veiling, secrecy and protection. Just as Prendergast references women's work through sewing, Maher's repetitious marks to symbolize hair make possible associations to the often-laborious nature of the domestic. The screen of hair in *Ombre* creates an illusion of a woman-shaped space in which identity, like that in Prendergast's *Love Table*, is an indeterminate state between presence and absence. I suggest that in their different

⁷⁴ Rozsika Parker discusses the physical immobility of the nineteenth-century embroiderer as submissive, yet contained and autonomous, in Parker, (1984), especially Chapter One. Prendergast's *Waiting* (1980), made during her art training, also references the stasis of woman's space through her title and in her representation of three women sitting.

⁷⁵ This image of loose tresses of hair recurs in the work of other women including the Anglo-French artist Alice Anderson (1976-) and German born American artist Kiki Smith (1954-).

ways both these artists can be seen to problematize Irish ideologies of 'woman' through their use of hair. Layers of probing into *Love Table* draw out possible allusions to an emotionally fraught history of women's place in Ireland, the performative nature of identity in its constructions and dissolutions, Ireland's status as a colonized country by England, and issues of migration and diaspora. Apart from the title of the work, there are other possible references to life stages and their memories; this includes adolescent moments, the classroom, the body and its dissipation, which sometimes must remain hidden, literally kept under the table.

If *Love Table* and *Love Object* are concrete representations of 'love', which Kathy Prendergast has created and publicly named, what can we read in this? What is the relation between Prendergast's uses of hair with the word *Love* in both these artworks? *Love* is such a personal and imponderable concept, and as unfixed as other large abstract concepts, including 'life', or 'art'. Love can speak of intensity; it can consume and arouse untameable emotions and feelings. *Love* can enable us to reflect on our suppressed psyche, to address inhibitions which societal norms and prohibitions make invisible. McKee believes that through her work Prendergast opens channels of communication between the rational and the unconscious into areas of emotion often considered taboo.⁷⁶ *Love Object* seems to map this abstract emotion sculpturally, by suggesting a relationship between the body and love onto which the viewer can project their own taboos and desires. In this piece the artist has attached a luxurious tress of hair to a hairbrush. The straying ends of the hair reach to a comb but have no attachment to it. For the brush and comb to reunite as a pair, the hair will have to be removed, as it comes between them creating unspoken tensions and blurring their boundaries. This juxtaposition adds a possible lyrical

⁷⁶ I paraphrase McKee here, McKee, in Prendergast, (1999), p. 20.

expressiveness to the work, as well as appreciation of the material richness in the profusion of hair. Holding echoes of fairytales, love's actions, and memories of mother-daughter relationships, the work simultaneously evokes the possibilities of partings. What might be seen as private articulations of separation that resonate between the brush and comb might also suggest wider symbolic implications of diasporic migration. A woman's hair historically has often been perceived as her crowning glory, and *Love Object* could also refer to women's negotiations with expectations of femininity and beauty.⁷⁷ Does 'woman' become a *Love Object* or can she challenge that position? Inferences may possibly be made that the flow of hair, separated from the female head, is a flag of femininity; women can literally cut themselves free from masculine expectations and dialogues.

Both *Love* pieces can be read as continually negotiating tensions between layers of meaning, functions, and materials. They can be seen to chart emotions and personal environments, hinting at other, and possibly earlier modes of embodiment, and questions of equilibrium between historic stabilities and instabilities of identity. Prendergast's use of hair has been shown to enable interrogations into how structures and systems of power, colonialization and diaspora, and embodied experiences, such as relationships and memories, might be suggested or symbolically represented.

Mapping Hair: A Human Geography of Place, Time, and Self

Prendergast began the series *City Drawings* in 1992 so presumably for some time she worked on the project concurrently with *The End and The Beginning 1* and *11, Love*

⁷⁷ The Bible, (Authorized King James Version), I Corinthians 11, 4 -15, specifically verse 15.

Table and Love Object, and other pieces.⁷⁸ This section will address her engagement with practices and metaphors of mapping, showing how these might be considered in relation to hair. To do this I will begin by briefly investigating four inter-related and fundamental aspects of geographical mapping: selectivity, naturalization, interpretation and relationships. Processes of mapping can provide the mapmaker with opportunities to create and represent realities based on historical or contemporary information. As Wood explains: “They make present – they represent – the accumulated thought and labor of the past,” achieving this through their selectivity.⁷⁹ Within a system of choices, preferences are made for some aspects over others, placing emphasis on what is present and what is repressed or absent; the finished work becoming a culturally constructed artefact.

In order for a map to succeed, its delineated features have to be understood and accepted as ‘real’, that is, as representations of what we think of as real. By reading these components the map then becomes naturalized, and admitted as reality. In *City Drawings* [Figure 4.12], Prendergast’s map of London for instance is not immediately recognisable as such. To complete a process of naturalization, we could relate our understanding of the map to its legend; we literally read the word ‘London’ in the title. Because it depicts a shape we associate with London, and possibly with the meanderings of the river Thames, we can accept it even though it is a map like none other of that city. These associations can occur without any identification of its signs and symbols, but through our hermeneutic reading of its legend and iconic and temporal codes, give it reality, and, in doing so Wood argues it is returned to myth.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ I have not been able to confirm this with the artist.

⁷⁹ Denis Wood, *The Power of Maps*, (London and New York: The Guildford Press, 1992), p. 1.

⁸⁰ According to Wood it is at this point that map becomes myth, because it is not really real; it is a fictitious statement about the world, Wood (1992), p. 1.

As visual representations of inventiveness, many of the *City Drawings*, for instance, those of Brussels, Yaounde, Paris, Lisbon, Moscow, Madrid and Washington DC, as well as London [Figures 4.13-4.19], suggest anthropomorphic images of tangled hair, balled and flattened on the page.⁸¹ These maps have also been described as evoking “living fibrous entities,” such as patterns of arteries, veins and neural pathways of the brain.⁸² Frances Morris proposes that the artist offers these evocations “as a kind of knowledge, derived through curiosity and imagination, in place of the kind of factual information we normally associate with maps.”⁸³ Reminiscent of Annegret Soltau’s *Meine Verlorenen Haare* but here in pencil rather than hair, cities are similarly preserved in isolation on otherwise empty pages.⁸⁴ Tenuous floating images recalling faint cobwebs of ghost towns, their arterial systems bleeding into the surrounding voids, are evocative of the loose and fraying hairs in Prendergast’s works with actual hair, which I have already discussed.⁸⁵ These phantom places are also suggestive of the absent bodies on the reverse faces of Soltau’s overstitchings or her installation *Eingesponnene Schaufensterpuppe (Wrapped Mannequin)* (1978) with spider’s webs and threads.⁸⁶ Yet other cities stimulate resemblances to half-finished items of clothing, such as collars, shawls, and bonnets, or forgotten archaic creatures and shapes from the natural world. The drawing of Mexico City for instance, evokes a dressmaker’s work-in-progress with its ragged edges and loose threads, while in that of Port Louis, Mauritius, an equine form appears to rear up on the page, and recalls

⁸¹ These cities are all illustrated in Prendergast, (1999).

⁸² Sarah Duncan, ‘Reviews: The End and the Beginning’, *Circa*, 91, (Spring 2000), p. 46.

⁸³ Frances Morris, ‘Art Now: Kathy Prendergast: City Drawings’, (1997),

<<http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/artnow/kathyprendergast/default.shtml>> [accessed 10 November 2008]

⁸⁴ See Figure 3.14.

⁸⁵ See also Prendergast, *The End and the Beginning*, (1999).

⁸⁶ See Figure 3.15.

the transience of physical reminders of the body, that Barthes so poignantly reads in the 'second grave' of his mother's clothing.⁸⁷

Prendergast's approach to mapping in *City Drawings* invites creative dreaming, where the viewer's imagination can be stimulated by representations of cities as spaces that suggest the geography of bodies; this association through the rhizomatic suggestions of hair-like webs is everywhere in this series. Elizabeth Grosz offers some philosophical insights into the complexity of the interactive networks of the city, where physical energies of human bodies are required for its construction. She explores the hierarchy of mind over hand in the importance of the "capacity to design, to plan ahead, to function as an intentionality".⁸⁸ Just as the body becomes subordinated to the mind, so too does the rural to the city, when the rural is defined as "the underside or raw material of urban development."⁸⁹ I suggest that in *City Drawings*, geographical constructions and processes of mapping can be seen to neutralize physical sensations and human emotions until only traces remain of the body, in this instance, hair and imaginable ghosts.

Somewhere between looking at original maps, and drawings from these, between decisions of inclusion and exclusion, the artist invests time and thought. It may be that during this time these cartographical practices, human interventions and reminders of the physical body become conceptually enmeshed so that one can be read for the other. Grosz describes the city and body as 'congruent counterparts' where:

⁸⁷ Barthes, (2000), p. 64.

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, 'Bodies-Cities', in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. by Beatriz Colomina, (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), pp. 241-54 (p. 245).

⁸⁹ Grosz, in Colomina, (1992), p. 242.

“the body and its environment, rather, produce each other as forms of the hyperreal, as modes of simulation which have overtaken and transformed whatever reality each may have had into the image of the other: the city is made and made over into the simulacrum of the body.”⁹⁰

Drawing on this argument the cities in Prendergast’s drawings might be seen as places in which processes of geographical selectivity can be seen to combine with a visual language of the city in which the human body is implicit, and which mirrors the fusion of the rational mind of the artist with the physical creation of an artwork. In these terms *City Drawings* evokes a series of nebulous impressions of the body through implication and suggestions of hair, dendrites and neural pathways, and lead us to ask if Prendergast is suggesting that the corporeal vigour of the external body hides a more fragile intellectual or imaginative intangible body.

We know the artist draws from current and surviving maps for her cities. Rather than charting new territory, she selects from existing aerial maps to re-describe the world. Each drawing traces networks of access and communication through which fictitious inhabitants can move in, out and around their city. Whilst these appear as labyrinthine entanglements of roads or endless grids concentrated around pivotal points, Francis McKee looks beyond the drawn lines on the page to symbolic possibilities when he describes them as “emblems of free-flowing networks that could transform our society if they remain open and accessible.”⁹¹ He transfers this idea onto the individual as he likens the brain with its neural pathways to these capital cities, as personal information retrieval and distribution centres.

⁹⁰Grosz, in Colomina, (1992), p. 242. Although Grosz is looking at how bodies project themselves into their environments and how these environments reflect the forms and interests of the bodies, rather than my discussion of a visual representation of the city as the body, her reasoning is useful here.

⁹¹ Francis McKee, in Prendergast, (1999), p.11.

Although it is impossible to know if Prendergast intended *City Drawings* to be read in the way McKee suggests, she has made clear that during her childhood, mental maps were of some significance to her even before she knew what maps were. She says:

“ I think that my identity was formed through a map language, and defined by where Ireland was in relation to Europe and in relation to the world...It was a very particular time when Ireland was trying to find its place and identity among Europe, and I myself was trying to find my identity as a young person, I think, oddly enough, it was all very connected.”⁹²

City Drawings might be seen to explore the conceptual space or place of the individual in society by alluding to the body in oblique ways, and intimations of hair are made possible through ambiguous, yet convincing metaphors. Nebulous connections to hair allow references to be made to the body by circuitous methods; referencing the individual as a citizen, or subject within a city. Prendergast makes explicit these associations when she says: “I drew my maps the size of human faces to relate to that idea of a portrait, so we could see them as a reflection of ourselves.”⁹³

While Prendergast has a fascination with mapping the landscape (and has formed several collaborations with the geographer Catherine Nash), Dorothy Cross has developed a parallel passion for portraying the sea and its creatures, specifically sharks and jellyfish, and their metaphorical possibilities. In 1999 Cross became aware of the story of Maude Delap (1866-1953), an amateur naturalist who bred jellyfish on Valentia Island in the early twentieth century. As a result of this Cross collaborated with her brother on an art/science project about jellyfish.⁹⁴ In prints from her film *Jellyfish Lake* (2002) [Figures 4.20 and 4.21], the umbrella shaped

⁹² Milliard, (Summer 2009), p. 43.

⁹³ Milliard, (Summer 2009), p. 43.

⁹⁴ See Tom and Dorothy Cross, ‘Medusae’ in Juncosa, (2005), p. 88 for information about this project. Photographic stills from this show close-ups of Cross swimming amongst jellyfish.

bodies of the jellyfish suggest the form of the human head; their fringed tentacles hang down not dissimilar to tresses of hair. Recalling decapitated heads, the jellyfish swim around the artist, their fronds and the artist's hair merging in the refracted light. In a 2-dimensional work from this series, *Jellyfish Pillowcases* (2003) [Figure 4.22],⁹⁵ fine lace edgings of the white cotton pillowcases mirror oceanic patterns and seaweeds of alien underwater cities that have been brought onto land. Centred on the pillowcases are ghostly dried-out remains of jellyfish evoking hair-like stains from absent heads. Networks of jellyfish nerves radiate in webs, and tentacles bleed out from the centre of the creature, again reminiscent of long tendrils of sensitive hair.

Prendergast's maps are explicit in relation to place as are Cross's *Jellyfish* works, the former on land, the latter underwater. The significance of time is also inferred in the work of both artists; in Prendergast's through the historical maps she references and literally draws from, and in Cross's through the lifespan of the jellyfish whose once fleshy bodies and hydrated tentacles become wraith-like when they leave their natural environment. In these art works Cross can be seen to depict the body as both alive and as a relic, while Prendergast's *City Drawings* evoke only reminders and traces of the living body.

Seriality and Equilibrium

In the preceding chapters, seriality in the work of Chrystl Rijkeboer, Alice Maher and Annegret Soltau has been mainly explored and discussed as repetitions of either actions or tangible materials that can be traced in their work. In Prendergast's art practices it can be seen as more a complex meshing of strategies. The importance she

⁹⁵ Tom and Dorothy Cross, in Juncosa, (2005), pp. 100-101.

places on the 'skin' of each work is made visible through her repeated recourse to drawing. Although many of her works are sculptural, the drawn, and drawn-on layer of the surface is paramount for her, and to some extent correspondences can be found with Soltau's interventions in the surfaces and layers in her photo-etchings and stitchings. In an interview with Paul Coldwell, we learn of Prendergast's aesthetic differentiation between the surface layer of her works and the volume of substrate beneath:

"The skin covers a surface, like a membrane...It's the skin of the thing that counts for me. And the skin can obliterate the form and becomes all about surface. It's like talking about what's underneath, through the surface."⁹⁶

Although it has been impossible to ascertain if Prendergast makes connections between the skin or surface of her works, and hair, this process suggests some metaphorical connections. Hair alters the surface of skin by growing through it, and this issue remains central to taboos of hairy bodies, particularly female bodies. Prendergast's fascination with drawing has already been discussed in *Seabed* where she draws contour lines and writes scraps of poetry over the body, while the series *City Drawings* are wholly drawn. This in turn stimulates and enables what is 'underneath' to be turned into something else, that is, interpreted. Current work for her most recent exhibition *Kathy Prendergast: The Black Map Series* shows her continued preoccupation with the surface.⁹⁷

This 'turning into something else' through metaphorical suggestion can also be seen throughout her work in her spatial structures and arrangements referencing the body. In *The End and The Beginning 1 and 11*, and *Love Object and Love Table*,

⁹⁶ Paul Coldwell, 'Paul Coldwell in Conversation with Kathy Prendergast 8/5/08,'

<<http://www.faderesearch.com/digitalsurface/case-studies/major-case-studies/kathy-prendergast/kathy-prendergast-interview/>> [accessed 22 January 2010]

⁹⁷ Held at Peer, London, 18 February-10 April 2010.

Prendergast's obsession with drawing is echoed in the ways she unites hair with domestic objects. The surfaces of the objects are altered through the addition of hair. In *Love Object*, hair between the brush and comb appears to have been in a literal sense drawn through from one to the other. I propose that these two strands of serial strategies; repetitive drawing, and what this enables in terms of imaginative explorations, might be interpreted as a repeated questioning of notions of equilibrium and space.

The parameters of any body or structure can be argued as existing in some form/s of serial relations; the 'spaces' of woman in Ireland were perceived historically as being within either the home or in close association with the land. However, bodies, like cities are, in general, flexible organizations that can be altered without damage to their existing structures (specific natural disasters or death excluded). Demolishing buildings, re-routing roads, omitting mapping symbols or locating devices in a city, or in the case of the body, haircuts, medical interventions, or fluctuating emotions, are not usually enough to destroy either city or body. Between the stability of serial relationships between parts of the body and the instability of dynamic ones, the body strives to remain in equilibrium. On the one hand the body constantly recreates itself through new cells, hair growth and so on, but it also discards its waste products, including hair, body fluids and that which is considered abject. This enables it as an organism to find balance in the exchange. Hair then can be seen as one of the most visible body parts in which its serial relationships with its host (the body) and its dynamic cycle of growth and shedding are usually in a state of equilibrium. For both security of the physical body and stability of identity, both static and dynamic elements are required.

Prendergast recently stated in an interview that the cyclical nature of life is a key issue in her work.⁹⁸ By arguing that the life cycle consists of fixed relationships of time that are repeatedly in a process of change, enables an understanding of the reciprocal elements of both stasis and dynamics. *The End and The Beginning 11* consists of traces of three consecutive life cycles with phases common or fixed to all three; birth, growth, maturity and death. The life cycle of hair is a shorter microcosm of this. My contention is that both static and dynamic elements are available continuously in the cyclical nature of life, as manifest in embodied beings, and in relationships between them. In Prendergast's art works with hair, seriality and equilibrium can be found specifically with reference to the life cycle.

By comparison, in *City Drawings* and *Seabed*, I suggest that the concept of equilibrium is more notional. The works enable questions of stasis and dynamics to be raised through analogies of the self. As a metaphor for the body within a cityscape or landscape, hair can be seen as introducing dynamism to these spaces. In *City Drawings* and *Seabed* these tropes of hair can be construed as stimulating and creating visible allusions to the potential flexibility of both these spaces, whereas in *The End and The Beginning 2* the material of hair enables a more determined reference point to cyclical embodiment. Prendergast's practice of mapping, rather than fixing the body in *Seabed* or attempting to categorically define specific cities according to a given set of symbols in *City Drawings*, appears to simultaneously deconstruct both the organization of mapping as well as the structures of the body and the city. Through its historical correlation to the landscape, and by implications to the female body *Seabed* can also be seen to expose hidden assumptions and implications of Irish ideologies of 'woman'. Although the artist has given no direct

⁹⁸ Milliard, (2009), p. 44.

indication of the importance of a serial investigation of equilibrium or balance to her work, she has intimated that mapping spaces and human experiences have been consistently important to her.⁹⁹

Prendergast's works, therefore, can be seen to explore ideas of balance and exchange. This might be within the spaces of domesticity and family, between the female and landscape as concrete bodies in a lived world, or between the city and our imagination at a global or cultural inventive level, enabling flights of fancy and creativity. In all these spaces hair and its representation has been shown to provide a strong and evocative symbol of identity.

Places and Spaces¹⁰⁰

In Prendergast's tangible representations of the body through hair, for instance, in *Love Table*, where she grafts hair onto domestic objects, they become strange.¹⁰¹

These works are caught somewhere between object and body and in complex ways locate themselves in both memory and the contemporary world. I argue that their ability to reflect the 'real' objects as they actually exist, within intangible spaces of emotion and communication, enables other readings. Tension between familiar household objects and hair can suggest spaces of home, which although defined through specific locations (places) in which we have once been located, are also

⁹⁹ Milliard, (2009), pp. 43-4.

¹⁰⁰ Michel De Certeau distinguishes place from space; he suggests place is a particular location, whereas space is composed of a series of "intersections of mobile elements", De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Randall, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1988), p. 117.

¹⁰¹ Defamiliarization through the addition of organic materials evokes loss and sensations of the uncanny according to Edlie L Wong, 'Haunting Absences: Witnessing Loss in Doris Salcedo's *Atrabilarios* and Beyond', in *The Image and The Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*, ed. by Frances Guerin and Roger Halles, (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), pp. 173-88 (p. 177).

spaces separate from, yet located in 'real' life. In this context, space might be described as a 'practiced' place.¹⁰² In other words, space can be understood as a place of becoming through the actions and events brought to bear on it at a particular time. 'Practiced' spaces of home, or the everyday, might be considered as necessary for the individual to locate the self within a cognitive map of their world. In this section I explore connections between spaces and places as suggested in Prendergast's works with hair.

Prendergast's depiction of a corner of 'home' in *Seabed* echoes Bachelard's description of a corner as a space of intimacy with a human 'root', and "a symbol of solitude for the imagination."¹⁰³ It is a place in which we can be separate, and as such can be understood as both a place and a space. In psychological terms the space of *Seabed*, in which the symbolic female body is set apart, could be variously interpreted as the emergence of the self, or recognition of the isolation of the individual. The actual places suggested by Prendergast's works with hair in the home combine with the many and indeterminate fictional spaces accumulated around them. Memories both recalled and forgotten inscribe these alternative spaces, what de Certeau describes as a "poetic geography on top of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning."¹⁰⁴ This spatial existence in the world combines with actions and historical conditions and experiences identified with the object and, in Prendergast's art works,

¹⁰² Again drawing from de Certeau, mobility, inherent in his concept of 'practice', "occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unit of conflictual programs or contractual proximities." De Certeau, (1984), p. 117. In some ways Judith Butler's theory of the performative shares some common ground with de Certeau's earlier concept of 'practice'. Butler argues that identity is "...performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results", and I suggest that 'identity' and 'practice' could be understood as interchangeable in their recourse to performative elements, See Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 34.

¹⁰³ Bachelard, (1994), p. 136.

¹⁰⁴ De Certeau, (1988), p. 105.

it might be argued that it is the presence of the human body (as hair) that ultimately gives these objects their relevance.

In *City Drawings* Prendergast has primary access to each city, since they are her creations, and our access or ability to walk her streets is filtered through her representations. De Certeau writes:

“Travel (like walking) is a substitute for the legends that used to open up space to something different. What does travel ultimately produce if it is not, by a sort of reversal, an ‘exploration of the deserted places of my memory’,... and the ‘discovery’ of relics and legends,...in short, something like an ‘uprooting in one’s origins’.”¹⁰⁵

By travelling in intellectual terms, that is to say, by reflecting on *City Drawings* through a number of dialogues, in this instance, based around the body (hair) and brain, I argue that Prendergast’s work enables questioning and explorations of the spaces of cities through notions associated with utopian ideals.¹⁰⁶ The ways in which the artist brings together disparate elements in the hair works enables an interchange of viewpoints about ‘woman’ and Ireland and the cyclical nature of life. By making visible the paradoxes of idealized or utopian spaces,¹⁰⁷ she opens up the possibilities

¹⁰⁵ De Certeau, (1988), pp. 106-7.

¹⁰⁶ Various philosophers (including Foucault, de Certeau, Augé) have taken different stands on the associated concepts of utopias, heterotopias and non-places with further writing emanating from their ideas. In order to relate it to hair in art history, this chapter has simplified the use of these terms. Michel Foucault writes, “utopias are sites with no real place,” whereas he defines heterotopias as counter-sites that do exist. See Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16, 1 (Spring 1986), 22-27 (p. 24).

¹⁰⁷ Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), *Utopia*, trans. by Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, (London: Richard Chiswell, 1685). Originally written in 1516 in Latin, this book has made the term utopian commonplace today, as an impossible dream, as a fundamentally unreal or non-place which is nevertheless a place of desire. See Foucault, (Spring 1986), 22-27, and de Certeau, (1988). Whilst the reflection in the mirror only exists in an essentially unreal, or virtual space, the mirror itself does exist. As such, Foucault names this a heterotopia, or counter space, and which he used in relation to the spaces of the contemporary world. (This concept arose out of a combination of events and intellectual thought in France from 1968, including a general strike by workers, student protests, social and economic crises and the transition away from notions of historic territory and its ideologies towards postmodernity.) Further analysis of Foucault’s theories of utopias and heterotopias is beyond the remit of this study, other than to confirm that this explanation has informed this chapter.

for other spaces within actual embodied experiences. In the following paragraphs I explore connections between these ideologies and spaces, and alternative spaces.

Specific cities as conglomerations of roads and buildings with an equally diverse composite of human life, including love, pain, poverty, greed, and power exist as real spaces, but the city as a ideal location in which people live and work in perfected forms of social places is essentially unreal. Prendergast's 'emptying-out' of all extraneous information in the city from the surface layer enables a liberation of space that can then become filled with other imaginative details and memories. I have already suggested that Prendergast's technique of drawing enables allusions to hair and the body as she maps alternative spaces of home. These may be more suggestive of the individual's place in the world in whatever spaces they find, rather than a reversion to a more utopian nostalgia in which her cities can be seen as substitutes for an originary 'home'. In this way, memory can be understood as interacting with history in personal spaces, of becoming something different. I suggest that De Certeau's metaphor of walking through the city is useful here to suggest one interpretation of the routes drawn by the artist, because it opens up the possibility of other questions. His statement: "To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper,"¹⁰⁸ enables us to ask how human beings position themselves in relation to spaces, places and bodies.

At least three relational aspects emerge if this notion is applied to Prendergast's *City Drawings*. In the artist's mapping of the city as she draws on the unmarked page, her pencil disrupts and alters the surface layer creating a spatially-placed two-dimensional representation. Similarly, when human beings walk through the city,

¹⁰⁸ De Certeau, (1984), p. 103.

their physical movements create and recreate spatial variations and social communications on the streets.¹⁰⁹ In more conceptual terms, when approaching artworks such as *City Drawings*, the embodied viewer may raise questions about possible interpretations and functions of the specific aesthetic experience. These works suggest different facets of the embodied experience, of how we identify ourselves as being what de Certeau terms as *here* or *there*.

How can we identify the spaces in which we live if not through reminders and metaphors of the body; what other references do we have? Prendergast's works can be seen to open up such questions. Where Irish ideologies, with their associations with the domestic and early familial spaces of the artist have been given hegemonic stasis, her work has shown that memories from these can enable recovery of other spaces within the places we call 'home' or the city. These spaces of otherness, either within 'home', or elsewhere, are insecure, since they are always subject to the unfixedness of identity and processes of thought; or in Deleuzian terms, endless flows and becomings.¹¹⁰

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored some of the ways that Kathy Prendergast's art practice frames hair as both material and metaphor, and empowers viewers to multiple insights into how these might work. Preferring to withdraw from creating direct representations of the female body, her later artworks offer less direct allusions to hair. My contention is that her technique of mapping in both *Seabed* and *City*

¹⁰⁹ De Certeau terms these "phatic topoi", (1984), p. 99.

¹¹⁰ I suggest that tentatively, they can be thought of as heterotopic spaces, available only as imaginative spaces, but like the reflected image in a mirror, or a telephone call, or in more contemporary terms –the internet – they can exist not only in their own time, but also in memory.

Drawings enables broadly similar but more conjectural notions of embodiment through analogies to hair. In the same way, her acknowledgement of the importance of drawing and the 'surface' in her works compared to what their volume might be (physically or imaginatively), draws attention to the concurrence of both aspects; both surface appearance and that which underlies it. Prendergast's work has been shown to question notions of place and space in relation to Irish ideologies, poetry, landscape, and gendered traditions, and in doing so enables the viewer to consider alternative spaces of lived experience by digging deep below what is suggested iconographically through surface, historical or aesthetic readings.

There are hints in Prendergast's work of challenges to earlier spaces of 'woman', and her work has been shown to invite the co-existence of several lines of enquiry, opening up new possibilities in the face of a crisis of historical values.¹¹¹ As Meskimmon articulates so clearly in her own resonant thinking: "It (*resonant thinking*) participates within an aesthetics of radical difference, formulating meanings as mutable figurations which are not tested by evaluating their ability to 'reflect' or 'represent' the already known, but by their potential to create and extend the parameters of our thinking and our knowledges."¹¹²

Similar arguments could be applied to Dorothy Cross's use of hair in her cowhide works. This series is redolent with attempts to undo pre-existing models of identity through gendered slippage, the unfixedness of religious imagery, physical deconstruction of family mementos and insubstantial corporeality. Such works invite alternative understandings and possibilities of Irish identities and domesticity.

¹¹¹ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 2.

¹¹² Marsha Meskimmon, 'Corporeal Theory with/in Practice: Christine Borland's *Winter Garden*', in Perry, (2004), pp. 124-37 (p. 135). My clarification of the subject matter in parenthesis and italics.

Similarly, I have suggested that deconstruction in Prendergast's art practices occurs on the surface; she sees it as a 'wondrous' act that allows it to become something else.¹¹³ It is up to her audience to move from near to far, to dig deep below the surface, and find that something else.

¹¹³ Coldwell, (8 May 2008).

Chapter 5

Revision, Transformation and Hair-Dos in the Work of Ellen

Gallagher

Introduction

“When Ellen Gallagher writes, she says she mixes tenses. *I don't know if it's about bad writing or what but I constantly slip, changing tenses midstream.* In other words for her, time and location are immutable.”¹

“But there are no new ideas waiting in the wings to save us as women, as human. There are only old and forgotten ones, new combinations, extrapolations and recognitions from within ourselves, along with the renewed courage to try them out.”²

My focus in this chapter will be on Ellen Gallagher's work from 2001 to 2007 when she repeatedly turned to hair as a productive and dominant trope for what can be seen as an extensive, detailed exploration of representations of, and challenges to, black identity and its transformations.³ Preoccupations with hair and race are predominant themes in her work, and within these, hair and wigs, together with lips and eyes, are key motifs. As I outlined in the Introduction, the concept of representation employed throughout this thesis is one that points to fluidity, and is not attached solely to the material image of the artwork. Through questioning and exploring an artist's use of materials, forms, colours, imagery, historical references and so on, various understandings of what might be represented in an artwork are made available to the viewer, and I argue strongly for this notion in Ellen Gallagher's work.

¹ Thyra Goodeve, *Ellen Gallagher*, (London: Anthony D'Offay Gallery, 2001), p. 8.

² From Audre Lorde, 'Poems are not Luxuries, 1977', in *Claims for Poetry*, ed. by Donald Hall, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1982), p. 284, and used as the half-title page quotation in Michelle Cliff, *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise*, (Massachusetts: Persephone Press, 1980).

³ I have deliberately used the terms black, white, blackness and whiteness in lowercase throughout this chapter in order to symbolically reduce the often-perceived hierarchy of white to black and the significance of both terms as oppositional ideologies.

Born in 1965 in Providence, Rhode Island, Gallagher partly fulfils the criteria of a European connection for my choice of artists in that she is of half-Irish parentage, and lives and works between New York and Rotterdam. Both her parents have ancestral connections to islands; her mother to Ireland and her father to Cape Verde, an archipelago off the west coast of Africa. Colonized by the Portuguese in the mid-fifteenth century, Cape Verde was an important location in the Atlantic salt and slave trades. The significance of these biographical references will be unravelled later in the chapter in relation to Gallagher's strategies with hair and what is termed 'the Middle Passage'. The Middle Passage alludes to the second of three parts of the return journey from Europe to America via Africa during the period of slavery from the mid-sixteenth century until its abolition at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The first leg took goods to Africa, then a human cargo from Africa to America, which was exchanged for coffee, tobacco and so on to sell in Europe. The concept of the Middle Passage has become synonymous with cultural oppression – with wretched conditions, shackles, high death rates and slavery for those who survived the voyage.⁴

Gallagher trained in the United States between 1982-1993, first at Oberlin, Ohio until 1984, then at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston where she studied art and art history from 1988 to 1992. The following year she attended the Skowhegan School of Art in Maine where she worked with Kiki Smith (b. 1954 Germany), Peter Halley (b. 1953 America), and Ann Hamilton (b. 1956 America), and began exhibiting her work from 1992. Between 1984 and 1988 she worked as a

⁴ See, for example, *Recovered Histories: Reawakening the Narratives of Enslavement, Resistance, and the Fight for Freedom*, <<http://www.recoveredhistories.org/about.php>> [accessed 3 August 2011], *Encyclopaedia of the Middle Passage*, ed by Toyin Falola, and Amanda B. Warnock, (High Wycombe: Greenwood, 2007), *Black Imagination and the Middle Passage*, ed. by Maria Diedrich, Henry Louis Gates, and Carl Pedersen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

deckhand on an Alaskan fishing boat, and during this time she claims the world 'opened up' to her.⁵ This gave her confidence when she sought employment on carpentry jobs and to pursue a place at art school.⁶ That is to say, she noticed that race did not hold the same primacy as it did in Rhode Island where she was brought up. Interpreting Gallagher's comment in the context of cultural hierarchies, it would seem that the colour of her skin and ethnicity was no more important than, for example, her gender, class, or manual dexterity might be; simply one aspect of her identity.

Gallagher's earliest work, including *Untitled* (1992) and *Oh! Susanna* (1993), was concerned with stripping down the black body into stereotypical symbols of lips and eyes which were meticulously repeated again and again on large expanses of canvas.⁷ This can be seen to create a notion of the 'abnormal' (through repetition) arising from what we perceive as 'normal' (facial features). Her arrangements of these signs refuse narrative readings of the paintings, and in some ways this allows us to locate Gallagher's work coterminously with Gertrude Stein's writing (1874-1946), which Gallagher cites as an early influence on her work.⁸ Stein developed an approach to writing that often omitted punctuation and nouns, preferring to use words as single entities rather than together to form what we understand as language.⁹ I suggest parallels could be drawn between Gallagher's individual signs of the body, for instance, lips and eyes, and Stein's juxtaposition and repetition of

⁵ This information is from the Clara database, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC. <<http://www.nmwa.org>> [accessed 1 December 2010] For a detailed account of Gallagher's training and early years, see Jessica Morgan, *Ellen Gallagher*, exh. cat. (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2001), pp. 17-21.

⁶ Peter Halley, 'Ellen Gallagher' *Index Magazine*, (1997).

<http://www.indexmagazine.com/interviews/ellen_gallagher.shtml> [accessed 7 February 2011]

⁷ These works can be found in Morgan, (2001), see note 5 above.

⁸ Stein's writing has been described as using words for their associations and sounds rather than for their meanings.

⁹ <<http://womenshistory.about.com>> [accessed 4 August 2011]

particular words. Curating Gallagher's first solo exhibition in Britain in 1998, Claire Doherty says:

"Gallagher's paintings appear to investigate not only the social and political prejudices of blackface and racism, but the fears underlying a violation of all dominant or normalized systems."¹⁰

Given these interests, one might argue that from early in her artistic career Gallagher was already aware of less visible complexities and tensions that work below the obvious. Her openness about other creative influences on her work is well documented, and she credits science fiction writer Samuel Delany (b.1942), an interest in forms of jazz music, and the African American poets of the Dark Room Collective with having informed her own ideas.¹¹ In 1987, and following the death of writer James Baldwin (1924-87) the Dark Room Collective called themselves after the poorly-lit room that originally held a photographic enlarger in a house in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and which became the meeting place of young black artists and intellectuals, including Thomas Sayers Ellis (dates unknown), Kevin Young (b. 1970), and Sharan Strange (b.1959).¹² Gallagher was invited to become the 'art coordinator' for The Darkroom Collective in 1988,¹³ and it was there that she heard and met Delany, and was exposed to his writing, particularly the novel *Dhalgren* in which he creates both fluid characters and time as a fluctuating concept.¹⁴ Gallagher was also interested in Delany's idea of the body as fragmented, as secretions, and as metaphors for memory.¹⁵ Given her early awareness of the

¹⁰ *Ellen Gallagher*, exh. cat. ed. by Claire Doherty and Thyra Nichols Goodeve, (Birmingham: Ikon Gallery, 1998), p. 13. I explain 'blackface' later in the chapter.

¹¹ Morgan (2001), pp. 17-27.

¹² Seen as one of the leading literary voices of the American civil rights movement, James Baldwin exposed the racial and sexual polarization of society, challenging his readers to confront these issues.

¹³ Brian Reed, 'The Darkroom Collective and Post-Soul Poetics', *African American Review*, (1 December 2007), 727-748.

¹⁴ Published in 1974 *Dhalgren* is a work of literary experimentation, sometimes described as Joycean (after the Irish writer James Joyce's style of writing).

¹⁵ Halley, (1997).

politics of race, Gallagher's involvement within an art school environment was supplemented by an alternative creative milieu that drew from black cultural and political literature. She notes that at a time when she was beginning to have exhibitions abroad as well as in America, changes were occurring in the art world. Black artists felt enabled to make work "that's sort of about nothing...work that can be just sort of whimsical...it doesn't have to be heavy work."¹⁶ Gallagher's awareness of particular forms and possibilities of black consciousness will be teased out in the following exploration of how she frames hair.

It was during her first solo show in New York at the Mary Boone Gallery (in 1996) that Gallagher discovered mid-twentieth century race magazines (targeted at a black readership) in Times Square. These included titles such as *Ebony*, *Our World* and *Sepia* and, inspired by a fascination with their history, she built up a collection of them dating from the 1940s to the mid 1970s.¹⁷ Their health, beauty and lifestyle advertisements using black models offered glimpses of a particular reality, and it was these rather than the editorials that interested Gallagher. Aidan Dunne, writing in 2007, understands the 'reality' Gallagher mentions as "one of aspirational, Eurocentric middle class."¹⁸ This comment might also be seen to reflect a Eurocentric perspective, and highlights the possible difficulties faced when discussing black issues from a mainly white viewpoint, when the apparently binary discourses are complex and problematic. I suggest that this issue of attempting to understand ourselves/others is a key concern when questioning notions of identity.¹⁹

¹⁶ Halley, (1997).

¹⁷ As explained in a gallery talk between Ellen Gallagher and Romi Crawford at Tate Liverpool on 8 April 2010 during the exhibition *Afro Modern: Journeys Through The Black Atlantic*, (29 January-25 April 2010). *Ebony* was created in 1945, *Our World* in 1946, *Sepia* in 1947, and *Jet* in 1951.

¹⁸ Aidan Dunne, 'The Evolution of African-American Consciousness: Visual Arts', *The Irish Times*, (3 October 2007).

¹⁹ Questions of approach and authority, regardless of subject matter, are inevitably bound up with the cultures and discourses in which we continually form our identities and opinions. Niru Ratnam, for

Race magazines, so called for their focus on black issues and life styles, guided their readership via advertisements and articles on how to achieve success in the home, at work and at leisure, introducing them to lifestyle products and remedies, and celebrating black achievements. Despite their promotion of a consumerist culture founded on race, their inclusivity can be seen in hindsight to offer a sense of community in easily accessible and popular formats. As I discuss later, these magazines were to become a staple source for Gallagher's work.

Hair has been a significant preoccupation for Gallagher as it has for several of her contemporaries, including Lorna Simpson (b.1960), and Kara Walker (b.1969), and who are also described as African American artists. In contrast to Gallagher, Walker and Simpson both make use of the silhouette. This not only serves to directly emphasize the contrast between black and white, but also references a more genteel and historical notion of art made by women.²⁰ Even in the twenty-first century, it would appear to be almost impossible to either read literature on, or discuss the work of these African American women artists within a discourse that is not constructed around and/or explores racial notions of blackness. This discourse continues to place black hair as a key racial signifier.

instance, makes the observation that the exhibition *Documenta 10* held in 1997 in Kassel, Germany, and one of a series of five-yearly exhibitions that surveys the field of contemporary art, was criticised for including too many artists from westernised countries in its initial attempt to examine globalisation. Five years later *Documenta 11* (in 2002) which was devoted specifically to exploring globalisation in relation to the visual arts, embraced artists from across the continents. See Perry and Wood, (2004) p. 77.

²⁰ Silhouette profiles or portraits became very popular in the eighteenth century, and were often seen as a genteel pursuit for women. Since silhouettes were relatively cheap, they were available to a wider audience than, say, oil paintings. See Joy Ruskin Hanes, 'Shady Ladies: Female Silhouette Artists of the Eighteenth Century', *Antiques Journal* (2009), 26-9, for a brief introduction to American silhouettes, or Sue McKechnie, *British Silhouette Artists and their Work, 1760-1860*, (London: Sotheby's Publications, 1979). Genteel pursuits were associated with ladies who had enough leisure time to follow their interests; women who worked would have had much less free time.

I will argue in this chapter that although Gallagher's works with hair might be seen as founded on historical rather than contemporary constructions, current socio-cultural perceptions of black hair still fuel a highly contested topic that continues to reflect notions of difference between white and other, when other refers to black. The film *Good Hair* (2009) directed by Jeff Stilson, for instance, asks pertinent questions around this much-debated and often gendered issue. In it actor and comedian Chris Rock investigates what makes 'good hair', and what feeds the machine of 'good hair'. He concludes amongst other things that black people no longer wear black hair; European and Asian hair seems to be the style and texture that women want today. For contemporary women, wearing black nappy or natural hair is often not an option if they are to be taken seriously, for instance, in the workplace; that is, to be taken as white.²¹

Although it could be argued that Gallagher's framing of hair and wigs (together with lips and eyeballs) in many of her works is based on perceived differences between black and white, her revisions of perceptions of this dualism are, I suggest, based on notions of hybridity rather than on ideas of 'other'. I explore how Gallagher's work can be seen to fuse composite materials, ideologies, and difference as variations in her art practices. These bring into focus possibilities in the works that allow the viewer to negotiate, and bring some understanding to, histories that are different from their own.²²

Gallagher uses a variety of materials in her paintings, prints and collages, some more ephemeral than others, for instance: penmanship paper, Plasticine, ink, enamel,

²¹ *Good Hair*, Dir. Jeff Stilson. Icon. (2009). I am not, however, suggesting that Gallagher's art is a critique of black hair not being seen as 'good hair'.

²² Homi K. Bhabha explores his understanding of the translational capacity of art in 'Postmodernism/Postcolonialism', in Nelson and Shiff, (2003), pp. 435-451.

varnish, salt, and gold leaf. Collage refers not only to the technique of pasting layers of paper and other ephemeral and disparate materials, but to the finished yet fragmented work too. It can be read as an attempt to create a new form of realism somehow indexed to the 'real' world.²³ Through techniques of layering and cutting, her images suggest complex palimpsests of socio-cultural histories that have shaped and informed inter-racial issues of black and white, and which to an extent can be seen to be analogous to her personal history. Her preoccupation with building hair (mostly on paper and canvas) will be shown to suggest notions of historical adaptations and re-workings of black identity, as well as visualisations of other issues.

Gallagher has also used video to a similar effect. *Murmur suite* (2003-4) created with Edgar Cleijne (b.1963 The Netherlands), is composed of five short works: *Watery Ecstatic*, *Kabuki Death Dance*, *Blizzard of White*, *Super Boo*, and *Monster*. These comprise found film footage, animation, and painting on the film surfaces, and use many similar motifs to those in her paintings. Gallagher has indicated that she sees the videos attempting to do literally what she hopes her paintings do in the minds of her audience. To paraphrase her words; each frame (or grid), is erased by the following frame (or grid) in a kind of projecting forward in the same space over and over again.²⁴

As well as exhibiting widely across the US and Europe, Gallagher has also shown her work in Australia and Russia, and several of her solo exhibitions have had

²³ Jennifer Farrell, 'The Effacement of Myth: A Study of the Work of Roland Barthes, Isidore Isou, François Dufrêne and Daniel Buren', *Athanor*, 20 (Florida: Florida State University, 2004), 95-101 (p. 96). <http://www.fsu.edu/~arh/images/athanor/athxxii/ATHANOR%20XXII_farrell.pdf> [accessed 23 February 2011]

²⁴ Ellen Gallagher in conversation. <<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/gallagher/clip2.html#>> [accessed 9 February 2011]

particular themes, for instance, *Preserve*, *Watery Ecstatic*, and *Coral Cities* (all 2001). This strategy can be seen as another way of communicating meaning beyond the artworks themselves and, possibly, of conveying political narratives. She has also given numerous interviews, some of which are available as online videos. Previous literature on her work includes exhibition catalogues, journal, online and newspaper articles and reviews. Many of these make frequent reference to her use of repetition and revision, and this theme will be explored in relation to her techniques of representing hair. The chapter will also explore the significance of gender in her work through issues of bloneness and the Middle Passage. This will be followed by an investigation of her textual languages of hair, and finally, I will unravel the mostly unexamined connection between Gallagher's background of black and Irish ancestry through blackface minstrelsy. Blackface minstrelsy erupted during the 1830s as a popular culture, principally in North America, in which white men blackened their faces with burnt cork and exaggerated their facial features in order to caricature their black countrymen. Seen by its proponents as a profitable means of entertainment, performers enacted songs, dances, and dialect inspired by black slaves on Southern plantations. A show might consist of a semi-circle of several white performers masquerading as black, and wearing outlandish and ragged clothes. The tripartite show usually comprised a selection of songs on banjo, fiddle, tambourine and bones punctuated by witticisms, followed by a 'stump' speech or similar, mainly malapropisms and comedy, and concluded with a narrative skit. Irishmen are reputed to have been the liveliest followers of Blackface, and what Eric Lott describes as a cognitive equation was apparent between the black and white working class.²⁵ Irish admiration for black songs and music combined with their

²⁵ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 35.

enjoyment at deriding blackness, and furthering this complexity, was also tempered by their own racial and class positioning.

The works I explore in this chapter include images from *Pomp-Bang* (2003), *eXelento* (2004), *DeLuxe* (2004-5), *Bird in Hand* (2006), and *Watery Ecstatic* (2001-7). Hair will be shown as the key framing mechanism for Gallagher's retellings, revisions and slippages between and among past and present fictions, earth and water, wo/man, and black and white. I argue that Gallagher's work seems to enable meaning to fluctuate from readings based around physical signs of black bodies in historical contexts, to breaches and fractures between bodies and time, and in doing so, creates new interstices as rich sites of meaning.

Histories of Black Hair

"It's your crowning glory, the top of your knot, the pinnacle of your person...It's your hair and you don't look good unless your hair looks good. But what does it say about you?...In African society, it speaks volumes, reflecting different cultures and identifying social and religious status and functions."²⁶

Over the centuries the histories of black hair have been reported back to the 'Western' world by voyagers such as the Dutchman Pieter de Marees in the seventeenth century. He was one of the earliest Europeans to write in any detail about African hairstyles. In 1602 he said of the men of Guinea:

"Firstly, they are very proud of the way in which they cut their hair, each in his own fashion and competing in style, one in the form of a Crescent, another in the shape of a crown, a third with three or four horns on his head,...among fifty men one would not find two or three with the same haircut (or shaved after the same fashion)."²⁷

²⁶ *Hair in African Art and Culture*, exh. cat. ed. by Roy Sieber and Frank Herreman, (Munich, London and New York: Prestel, 2000), p. 8.

²⁷ Pieter de Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)*, trans. from the Dutch and ed. by Albert van Dantzig and Adam Jones, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 33.

European explorers trading with Africa from the mid-fifteenth century to the mid-sixteenth century were fascinated by African produce, textiles and hairstyles. We know from reports such as that of de Marees' that during this period, hair in particular was of paramount importance in African cultures; its cleanliness and styling was richly symbolic, and a marker of geographic origination. Conversely, unkempt hair signalled loose morals, dementia or evil spirits, and when a man went to war or died, his wife would leave her hair loose as a sign of her distress.²⁸ Hair was also seen as richly imbued with spiritual significance since it was the closest part of the body to the gods, and thus the hairdresser held a special place in the community. For Yoruba men and women of West Africa (mainly Nigeria and Benin, and Africa's largest ethnic group), this meant that only family members would be allowed to style hair because they could be trusted not to harm it and so keep safe relationships with the spirits.²⁹ Taking from several hours to several days, traditional hairstyling served to strengthen bonds between sitter and stylist.

Tools used for hairstyling in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were in general often rudimentary, and included razors, wooden or ivory combs for untangling the hair, pins for drawing partings, and fibres, rags, grease and clay for giving and holding sculptural form. In seventeenth and eighteenth century literary descriptions of the diverse and elaborate motifs and cultural symbols associated with black hair, certain words seem to recur.³⁰ These include crest, curl, braid, tuft, coil, pompom, tail, pleat and corkscrew. Many of these indicate not only the sculptural form and

²⁸ Ayana D. Byrd, and Lori L. Tharps, *Hair Stories: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America*, (New York: St. Martin's, 2001), p. 3.

²⁹ Byrd and Tharps, (2001), p. 4. The fear was that hair clippings might fall into the wrong hands and be used to do their owner harm. See also Sieber and Herreman, (2000), p. 25.

³⁰ De Marees, (1602), trans. by van Dantzig and Jones (1987).

styling of the hair, but also the techniques and actions involved in their creation.

Similar descriptive terminologies to those used in the academic texts I draw from are also to be found in the popular black magazines from 1930's onwards. I suggest that not only does Gallagher literally extract textual material of similar words, but she also creates similar forms to symbolize hair; curls, braids and coils in Plasticine.

During approximately four hundred years of slavery (from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries), traditions of black hair were radically reworked. The first African slaves who arrived in North America in 1619 worked under the same terms as white indentured servants from the British Isles, and were allowed to buy their freedom when their work contracts expired. However, by the mid-seventeenth century, indenture was overtaken by race-based slavery, which led to loss of rights for the slave but greater economic power for white colonisers.³¹ By the early eighteenth century anyone with black ancestry could be enslaved, and so the thirty or so years when freedom for the African in America was a realistic possibility soon became no more than a memory.

Traders who continued to ship slaves to America shaved the heads of their captives, thus erasing their highly visible individual cultural and personal identity in the process. According to Ayana Byrd and Lori Tharps, without their usual hairdressing tools, slaves often resorted to carders (normally used on sheep) or in the case of women, they might tie material around their heads, which kept their hair tidy and free from lice.³² In searching for alternatives to traditional scalp cleansers, grease and dyes, slaves resorted to other hairstyles. Gradually those slaves who worked inside the house were influenced by the ways their owners dressed their hair, and so

³¹ Byrd and Tharps, (2001), p. 11.

³² Byrd and Tharps, (2001), p. 12.

differences in black styling began to signify whether the slave was plantation or house-based. White owners from as early as the 1700s often referred to black hair as 'wool', and which further denigrated the black body. Divisions also developed between those of darker and lighter skin tones, as a 'mulatto elite' of children fathered by the white owners segregated themselves in their own communities. They were perceived to have 'good hair' and light skin.³³ Meanwhile, slaves who attempted to straighten their hair hoping for social and economic advantage were often ridiculed by the press for being pretentious in their pursuance of white standards.³⁴ This led to the invention of blackface characters such as Jim Crow and the beginning of minstrelsy.³⁵

Even when emancipation from white rule began in the latter part of the nineteenth century, hair remained a key concern for black cultural and racial identity. In some church communities, for instance, comb and brown bag tests had to be passed before acceptance into the congregation. The benchmark of the former was if a fine comb could pass smoothly through the hair, while skin tones were gauged against a paper bag. As a result of this, skin lighteners and hair straighteners were much in demand, and consequently these tools and products widely advertised.³⁶ It is magazines with advertisements that follow in these traditions that Gallagher first saw in Times Square more than a century later, and which she has cut, styled and layered in artworks including *Pomp-Bang* (2003) and *DeLuxe* (2004-5).

³³ These phrases come from Byrd and Tharps, (2001), p. 19.

³⁴ Byrd and Tharps, (2001), p. 20.

³⁵ See Lott, (1993).

³⁶ The most famous purveyor of these in the southern American states was known as Madam C. J. Walker. Her initial interest was in enhancing her own appearance, but once she succeeded in concocting a recipe for improving hair growth she went into business selling a variety of products, and became financially rich through what might be seen as her philanthropic intentions to offer all black Americans the luxury of beauty rituals. See Byrd and Tharps, (2001), pp. 33-36. See also the book by Walker's great great granddaughter, A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C J Walker*, (New York: Scribner, 2001).

As Byrd and Tharps argue, the relative freedom of the 1960s, when permissive social attitudes encouraged varied cultural trends and fashions, black 'Afros' were often considered to be fun, as part of the 'Black is Beautiful' movement. However by the 1980s black hair once again had become a subject of political contention; braids, conrows, afros and other traditional black hairstyles could mean professional suicide in the workplace; once again 'concepts of good' and 'bad' were applied to hair.³⁷ From around 1987, in America, several cases of employment discrimination occurred on grounds of hairstyling, which contributed to petitions against employers who adopted particular grooming standards. These were perceived as disproportionately affecting black women displaying their cultural heritage. By the 1990s a myriad of styles flourished, and natural, chemical constructions, and extensions, emerged at a time when freedom of choice was a media- and culture-driven concept.³⁸ To quote Aria, (one of Ingrid Banks' interviewees):

"I think we're starting to express our individuality. So now I think we're coming into an age of flexibility for ourselves where we're not letting someone else determine for us so much what is black, what is not black...we're allowing ourselves to express ourselves and feeling good about being black and all our different blacknesses."³⁹

"It's all about repetition and revision ": Processes, Tools, Materials"⁴⁰

Repetition and revision have been important elements in Gallagher's strategies for many years. Sitting in front of *DeLuxe* (2004-5) [Figure 5.1] in Tate Liverpool in 2010, she told her audience that even as a child she layered her paper dolls with

³⁷ Byrd and Tharps, (2001), pp. 103-6, 123.

³⁸ Ingrid Banks, *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women's Consciousness*, (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 140-1.

³⁹ Banks, (2000), p. 139.

⁴⁰ This quotation by Ellen Gallagher is found in Suzanne Hudson, 'Ellen Gallagher: Talks about Pomp-Bang, 2003', *ArtForum*, (April 2004), and has been used by several critics and websites including that of the Tate, London.

clothes to such an extent they had to be stapled on the doll's body, and ripped off when it became too swollen.⁴¹ Elsewhere she has said that this layering effect on her dolls made her think of Boli figures: "African objects built from accumulation and ritual," and many of her works show techniques that echo these stated concerns.⁴² However, Gallagher refutes Romi Crawford's suggestion of how easy it might be to think of layering as positive and erasure as negative: "That's such a bad image. I have to cut it."⁴³

As mentioned earlier, black lifestyle magazines such as *Ebony* (1945-) and *Sepia* (1947-), attracted Gallagher in the mid-1990s first by their grid-like arrangements of advertisements, and later by their subject matter; they were not magazines with which Gallagher had grown up.⁴⁴ In examining *Ebony*'s archive, it is noticeable that in April 1960, for instance, it was not only publicising a plethora of health and beauty products, but many were advertised several times throughout each issue in different formats. I suggest that this notion of repeating and reworking (advertisements) is one that Gallagher can be seen to exploit in her own work through both revisions and repetitions of particular advertisements, as well as a more general concept of repetition of the black body through hair. She explains her interest in abstracting certain elements of the head from these magazines in order to work with the spatial relationships between bodies:

"The content in the work is not sequential but spatial. So often black bodies have been materially and physically constricted and I think that I am less interested in locating 'being' inside the body – in order to make the point that being doesn't *only* exist inside the body. Like most Americans I am obsessed with captivity, but this is not a slave narrative. It's *after* the explosion. The fracture has already happened."⁴⁵

⁴¹ Gallagher and Crawford, (8 April 2010).

⁴² 'History and Drag: Ellen Gallagher in Conversation with Cheryl Kaplan', <<http://www.db-artmag.com/archiv/2006/e/1/1/408.html>> [accessed 1 December 2010]

⁴³ Gallagher and Crawford, (8 April 2010).

⁴⁴ Gallagher and Crawford, (8 April 2010).

⁴⁵ Morgan, (2001), p. 26. (Gallagher's emphasis.)

Gallagher might be understood as making the point that although lips, eyes or flips of hair are all body parts, they can be read as more than the physical body. When these elements are located 'outside' the body, that is as abstracted forms, they can be seen to engage or appropriate other meanings. I suggest these might include complex and elusive temporalities, narratives and imagery that include references to the Middle Passage, mid-twentieth century black American culture, and minimalist tendencies of repetition and grids. Her work might also be seen to signal more contemporary political issues, such as fears of terrorism particularly in the aftermath of 9/11, when The World Trade Centre, a symbol of America, literally exploded. But Gallagher's statement might also refer to her interest in science fiction because, in that same interview with Jessica Morgan, the artist actually links the super-signs of race, such as hair, lips, eyes and so on, with dark matter, saying: "dark matter is expansive not reductive."⁴⁶ The notion of 'dark matter' can also be seen as a metaphor for black American culture that has been to some extent invisible and unacknowledged by white American culture. The 'explosion' might be understood as something less determined than black physicality or hairstyling, and more about the mutability of the signs, and how they can change in different temporalities and contexts, and how shifting and unstable (black) identity might be.

Some of Gallagher's earlier works (other than those I am examining in relation to hair), such as *Untitled* (2000) evoke different worlds of unfixed coordinates.

Although the symbols of hair, wigs, lips and eyes consistently appear as recurring signs in her work, Gallagher's relation to those devices has been fluid and changing,

⁴⁶ Morgan, (2001), p. 26. Dark matter is the scientific term for a non-luminous form of matter, that cannot be directly observed, but whose existence is deduced from its gravitational effects on other bodies. An anthology of black writing entitled *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction From the African Diaspora* (New York: Aspect, 2000) includes Samuel Delany.

not necessarily in linear ways, but as mutable subject matter. And, whilst she notes her awareness of black or African American narratives, Gallagher's treatment of time seems to be as unfixed and changing as her arrangements of the body parts. As Éric de Chassey argues: "Gallagher's iconography never references a world of stable essences."⁴⁷ Bearing this in mind, I argue that through the content of the work, Gallagher can be seen to question the very concept of identity, albeit mainly around notions of blackness; hers is an identity that is constantly changing, unstable or unlocated, and describes actions and occurrences, rather than relying on a series of revised definitions. As I show later in this chapter, this corresponds to Judith Butler's early theories of performativity where she argues that identity is constructed through acts, gestures and so on, and: "the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means."⁴⁸ Given that these acts and gestures are construed as exterior actions around identity, albeit creating allusions to a more stable notion of selfhood, then they can be seen to actively suggest that the body/identity/self is composed solely of these unstable and shifting actions to give it a form or forms of reality. As I explore later in this section, the gestures and imagery Gallagher uses suggest identities that are in processes of eruption, of bursting free.

Some of Gallagher's materials, including scalpel, Plasticine, varnish and correction fluid, recall both traditional African, and slave equivalents of hairdressing tools and techniques, for instance, where a razor might once have shaped the hair, Gallagher uses a scalpel. Plasticine is suggestive of grease, clay and other moulding materials, and varnish might stand as a substitute for creams and greases. The paper Gallagher used in her earlier pieces has been described as 'penmanship'. This is a type of

⁴⁷ Éric de Chassey, in Ellen Gallagher, *I Mutanti: Ellen Gallagher*, (Rome: Drago, 2010), p. 13.

⁴⁸ Judith Butler, (2006), p. 185. Butler's emphasis.

gridded paper commonly used for repetitive writing in order to improve handwriting skills; in other words an extremely symbolic paper for revision/s.⁴⁹ She recounts in 1997 how she found a notebook, thrown away on the street with the words 'We are a drug-free school, have a nice day', written inside. The notion of the child's practice book, with its block writing, and infantilizing of language appealed to her.⁵⁰ She said in 2001: "The penmanship paper is not fine it is fugitive. And it will darken with time which I love."⁵¹ Etymologically, fugitive can refer to absconding as a runaway, but it also means to be of a transitory nature, such as fugitive paint or charcoal that is not materially fixed in a ground. Gallagher's use of the term combines associations of blackness (through hair) with notions of migration and mutation in her transformative wigs. She has claimed that:

"Paper as support, it's own materiality is usually ignored. So the sense of a neutral surface that can accommodate any mark seems an ideal way of communicating freedom. At the same time printed material has the capacity to repeat itself endlessly."⁵²

Whilst we can understand that Gallagher has deliberately chosen what she sees as neutral ground for her work, her association of it to freedom raises issues around the construction of ideologies in terms of the ability of printed material to be repeated endlessly. If ideologies are reinforced through particular signs and perceptions then Gallagher's work could be seen as bolstering perceptions of blackness even as it could be argued as contesting those same ideas. In 1997 artist and curator Howardena Pindell (b.1943) accused several black artists of leaving the spectator bemused and floundering in representations of blackness that on first glance appear to validate racial clichés and typecasts. Although many of her points were

⁴⁹ Penmanship paper is also called handwriting practice paper.

⁵⁰ Halley, (1997).

⁵¹ Thyrza Nichols Goodeve, 'This Theatre Where You Are Not There: A Conversation with Ellen Gallagher', in Doherty and Goodeve, (1998), pp. 17-23 (p. 20).

⁵² Ellen Gallagher in Morgan, (2001), p. 21.

specifically directed at Kara Walker, whom Pindell saw as making use of imagery associated with racial abuse and thus pandering to stereotyping, she also included Gallagher in her comments.⁵³ Pindell said of Gallagher's early use of eyes and lips in relation to her minimalist-treated canvas: "The 'power' of the negative stereotype is implied even though fragmented and continues to reinforce the old stereotypes."⁵⁴ I suggest this shows the limitations and tensions within the tropes of blackness to raise and contest problematics of race.

Gallagher's use of Plasticine can be seen to correspond to an increase in the use of liminal aesthetic media in art practices during the twentieth century; a development Catherine de Zegher describes as being 'post-minimal and post-painterly'.⁵⁵ An extremely malleable and versatile vehicle for creative expression, Plasticine enables the artist to create intricate decorative effects and repetitious marks, and it is of considerable significance in Gallagher's practices. As she uses it to represent black hair, its malleability might be seen to allude to the mutability of historical constructions of black identity during and after slavery, and up to the present day. Her preference for using yellow or white Plasticine to represent hair is also indicative of the thorny issue of black versus blonde hair. Repetitious and rhythmic decorative effects of curls, bangs, leaf forms, stripes, bones, circles, swags, flowers, ribs, and so on, that Gallagher forms as Plasticine-work, are mirrored in the grid structures of the works themselves.

⁵³ Howardena Pindell, 'Diaspora/Realities/Strategies', *N.Paradoxa*, (7 July 1998), 12-26. <<http://www.ktpress.co.uk/nparadoxaissue7.pdf>> [accessed 25 February 2011] See also Michael Corris and Robert Hobbs, 'Reading Black Through White in the Work of Kara Walker', in Perry, (2004), pp. 105-123.

⁵⁴ Pindell, (1998), p. 15.

⁵⁵ Catherine de Zegher, 'The Grid as Playground or The Creativity of Limits', in *Ellen Gallagher Preserve*, ed. by Jeff Fleming and others, (Iowa: Des Moines Art Center, 2001), pp. 55-64 (p. 56).

In *eXelento* (2004) [Figure 5.2], for instance, 396 separate portraits (in twelve rows of thirty-three) form a sea of sightless faces bobbing rhythmically across the gallery wall, calling attention to multiple revisions within the single trope of hair. *eXelento* is one of a series of works of this size, all with similar numbers of individual frames within an overall grid. In other words, Gallagher has laboriously constructed several thousand single works in this series. Repetition and process are concerns associated with labour, and this aspect is borne out in Gallagher's vast canvases. She has suggested how important the actual labour involved in each piece is, and additionally how toward the conclusion of a work, in particular, it becomes more complicated.⁵⁶ She explains it thus:

"Once I start to get an efficiency or proficiency with what I am doing I have to complicate things so that there is this sense that the labor is growing and growing and could overwhelm me. That possibility is so very important – that I almost can't finish it."⁵⁷

Given that repetition is formed through generative actions, it has been argued that this lessens the possibilities of closure by indicating continuance and recurrence.⁵⁸ Thus the imagery that is repeated or revised in the multiple format of the works simultaneously appeals to memory and time, through the previous expressions of certain forms or images, as well as conveying the possibility of other future revisions; in other words, they can be suggestive of evolutionary processes.

Gallagher's revisions of hair evoke endless permutations and they have also stimulated a variety of sometimes contradictory readings of her work, which might be seen to be invited by the artworks themselves, for instance Pindell's. De Chassey

⁵⁶ She relates her black paintings to factory work and hand cutting rubber. These works include *Eleganza* (1998) and *Dance You Monster* (2000).

⁵⁷ Morgan, (2001), p. 27.

⁵⁸ Ellen K Levy, 'Repetition and the Scientific Model in Art', *Art Journal*, (Spring 1996), 79-84 (p. 79). <http://homepage.mac.com/allanmcnyc/amcpdfs/levy_repetition.pdf> [accessed 5 January 2011]

reveals his concerns with linking Gallagher's work to race. He suggests that if we draw on a simplified reading of her iconography and her biography, there may be a tendency to think no wider than an African-American perspective.⁵⁹ Supporting Gallagher's stated intentions, he says: "The point, in all these pictures, is neither to identify, nor to find definitive identification, but to question oneself and open oneself up to questioning."⁶⁰ This remark suggests that firstly the works can make possible questions about identity itself, without locating it within a racial dialectic; and secondly that they can enable the viewer to question not only their interpretation of the works but what the works might suggest about them. Judith Wilson, by contrast, suggests that the visual symbols Gallagher uses (hair, wigs, lips, and eyes) function as reminders to unfold historical narratives.⁶¹ So while Wilson may be content to engage with the work through historical and racial discourses, although not as Pindell does, de Chassey wants to de-limit the discussion. He, with Gallagher, sees possibilities in the work beyond the inevitability of race, that engage with more contemporary tropes of black American culture, and that no longer limit the black body to fixed markers of identity at a particular time. This viewpoint seems to offer a broader and richer potential for some of the meanings I have been exploring.

Repetition as a notion is inevitably bound up with physical margins or limits, such as those encountered in printing processes. It can also be seen in much of Gallagher's work, especially her larger pieces, through the ways she repeatedly uses rectangular frames and framing strategies, and in the particular symbols of hair and wigs. Such repetition of motifs or arrangements of images can also act as limiting factors

⁵⁹ de Chassey in Gallagher, (2010), p. 13.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Judith Wilson, 'Sniffing Elephant Bones: The Poetics of Race in the Art of Ellen Gallagher', *Callaloo*, 19, 2, (Spring 1996), 337-9 (p. 339). Wilson calls them 'history paintings'.

through more conceptual notions of exclusion and choice.⁶² Discussing the touring exhibition *Preserve* (2001-2), de Zegher convincingly locates Gallagher's work in an architectonic discourse, from the frame (constructed below the canvas allowing Gallagher to sit on it to work), to the grids of images and "climbing poles of *Preserve's* jungle gym [Figure 5.3]."⁶³ I suggest the functional benefits of Gallagher's utilisation of a framework below the canvas fulfil a similar purpose to an easel, but on the horizontal plane; that is, logistically as an efficient support to the work in progress.⁶⁴ By locating herself on the canvas Gallagher also symbolically places herself in a spatial relationship with the work. She explains her rationale for the grid of the small individual frames as follows:

"When you are reading a magazine or book, then that's a particular kind of reading. It's a kind of sequential page by page, and you remember what you've just read five pages ago, or you don't. But how you keep that information, and the reading of a painting, what I loved was this idea of opening up the pages so that your sequence was more spatial than sequential."⁶⁵

Gallagher compares the understanding that comes from sequential reading, which could be understood as linear history, with alternative ways of reading. In spatial sequences, the reader or viewer may extract altogether different and more fluid meanings and memories than from a conventional linear sequence. However, the regular confines of a rectangular page impart order and Gallagher's positioning of her frames is precise, for instance in *DeLuxe*. If she hung her works in a more random format such as Rijkeboer does in *Home Sweet Home* (see Figure 1.9), then their spatial arrangement might detract from her narrative and subject matter.

⁶² Gallagher's large canvases include *Double Natural*, *POMP-BANG*, *eXelento*, *Afrylic*, *Falls and Flips*, and *DeLuxe*.

⁶³ De Zegher in Fleming, (2001), p.56. Several other critics have also used the potentially inflammatory term 'jungle-gym' in reference to this work. I have been unable to ascertain if it came from the artist.

⁶⁴ Gallagher worked for a short while as a carpenter, and found these skills useful at art school where she constructed her first canvases over a latticework grid covered in plywood to which she attached canvas – not the traditional method of stretching a canvas.

<<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/gallagher/>> [accessed 11 January 2011]

⁶⁵ Ellen Gallagher speaking on a U-Tube Video dating from 2008, 'Art21: Ellen Gallagher'. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ldnd40lUaBY>>s [accessed 17 December 2010]

Drawings that accompany the wooden frame in *Preserve* echo the geometrical lines of the structure but make concessions to movement and exchange between them, for instance in the frames *Ice or Salt /Paris Doll* and *Yellow* (2001-2) [Figures 5.4 and 5.5]. Keeping the original magazine page of hairstyles unchanged in *Ice or Salt /Paris Doll*, Gallagher works into the edges of the page extracting and appending lips, eyes, and sinewy shapes in oceanic colours. In *Yellow*, Gallagher appends jagged and curving points of Plasticine to the magazine page. Similar forms riffle on the wooden structure like barnacles on the underside of a boat evoking exchange between the constructed frame and the single images. I suggest that the skeletal frame of the 'gym' structure of *Preserve* evokes an eerie slave ship once crowded with men and women, and the accompanying drawings function as reminders of the few who survived.⁶⁶ Not only might Gallagher be seen to evoke or even conserve memories of slavery, but her title also signals that it is a protected area, a domain over which she has exerted some ownership.

Connections have been drawn on a formal level between Gallagher's repetitions of austere lines and grids and Minimalism, and in particular to Agnes Martin's (1912-2004) subtle geometric paintings. Greg Tate suggests that minimalist and conceptual practices have enabled black artists to find ways into the white art world.⁶⁷ Whether this is the case for Gallagher is open to interpretation, since she was already forging connections and relationships within the art world even during her training.⁶⁸ In Tate's correlation of art to music, he likens the black artist seeping into cracks in white modernism much as jazz music is seen as a site of negotiation and

⁶⁶ Men were allowed approximately 6' x 1'4" space on a slave ship, women and children less.

Numerous images of the different ships operating have been made available on the World Wide Web.

⁶⁷ Greg Tate, 'Rewind', in Morgan, (2001), pp. 11-15 (p. 13).

⁶⁸ Her biography details at least nine group exhibitions in which she showed her work during 1992-3, when she was at art school. See <<http://www.hauserwirth.com>>

improvisation on the rigours of classical music. So when Gallagher began her early painting on penmanship paper, she was seen to be engaging with some of Minimalism's defining characteristics. Her materials and processes were apparent and direct, her repetition of simple shapes, and her use of the grid in the numerous sheets of paper assembled in each painting, apparent lack of expression or emotion in the work, and neutral colours, all serve to reinforce this opinion. And whereas from afar Gallagher's spots and squiggles might reiterate this thinking, close examination of the painted surface reveals disembodied eyes and lips, and suggestions of emotive narratives. In other words, her work might be seen as percolating the cracks in a mainly white art world.

Since she began her artistic career Gallagher has focused closely on detail, and in doing so her intimacy with each frame or piece is communicated to the viewer. The individual frames in works such as *DeLuxe* or *eXelento* appear as single windows, holding the audience in a one-to-one relationship. In focussing on a single image, we can notice each mark, each fold of hair threatening to overwhelm with their detail, but when viewed from a distance, these vast canvases become framed as a single unit within the gallery space. Lyra Kilston and Quinn Latimer describe them thus: "from afar, intricate abstractions; up close, unnerving narratives."⁶⁹ I suggest this can be seen as analogous to embodied experiences, which can offer a clearer perspective from a distance but, in withdrawing, we can also disassociate ourselves. Detachment is more difficult when we engage closely with the subject matter or image; it may either engulf us, or, like a repeated word lose some of its original

⁶⁹ Lyra Kilston, and Quinn Latimer, 'Ellen Gallagher: Creating The World She Longs For', *Modern Painters*, 21, 2 (March 2009). Available at <http://cloud.hauserwirth.com/documents/Mp35q46LK92S030m3e7T1wXmt9I62Wf84esNC5Ti4mXdcl3x1a/modernpainters_march-091-qmk55g.pdf> [accessed 17 December 2010]

meaning. In these ways, it can remind us of how fluid meaning and our responses can be to the contextual spaces of embodiment.

Karate (2001-2) [Figure 5.6](one of the *Preserve* drawings) is vertically divided into two halves. At the left Gallagher has inserted an advertisement for 'Karate: The Total Self-Defence System', where an angry foot and fist kick out against small, yellow Plasticine blobs bobbing above a mass of pale blue lip shapes. To the right of this aquatic imagery with its references to spawning, surfacing and emerging, is a grid of female heads with various hairstyles. Their captions of 'LIONESS', 'NEVER NEEDS SETTING', 'BROWN SKIN BEAUTY', 'FREEDOM WIG' evoke women who have literally risen above hair troubles.⁷⁰ Interestingly Gallagher places 'AFRO SWIRLY' and 'AFRO STOVE PIPE' at the bottom of the image and 'NEVER NEEDS SETTING' and 'FREEDOM' at the top. The sightless models in Gallagher's grid all have yellow blobs for eyes, a common practice in many of her works, where the eyes are either whited out or covered with Plasticine or another material. In a second piece from this series, *Ice or Salt/Curl Cascade* (2001-2) [Figure 5.7], repetition has even stronger associations with revisions. At the bottom of the image a series of lips lie as residue below a row of Afro puffs and knots. Above these a further four rows of heads become increasingly shapeless and amorphous, with only their captions distinguishing one from another.

In *Karate* the black figure that both kicks and punches out in self defence might be interpreted as a political action against systems and organisations that have repressed the black subject. Peter Urban writing in the mid-1960s said: "No longer is man's strength limited to the weapon he carries: he now possesses the 'weaponless

⁷⁰ For clarity, I have put the phrases and words found in Gallagher's pieces in small capitals.

weapon', his own body."⁷¹ Disciplines such as karate can be seen to empower the student or devotee to express their aggression and emotion and live without fear. *Ice or Salt/Curl Cascade* on the other hand, points to a 'black politics' where ice and salt can be seen as an analogous site of tension. Unlike ice and water, which become warmer through thermal exchange, ice melted with salt becomes colder because less energy is released. Gallagher can be seen to suggest here in her strategy with hair that no matter how many products and techniques are used on black hair, it will always be seen as secondary to white hair; it has a low energy. This analogy can also be seen as a metaphor for the socio-political positioning of blackness in mainly white America. When Vanessa Bell Galloway says in the film *Good Hair*: "You think when it's straightened you're gonna have that hair, but it's never yours to start with," she knows that the physical characteristics of black hair will never be the same as those of white hair, and by inference, her comment on hair might also be read as analogous to social and cultural difference.⁷²

I suggest that Gallagher's strategy of using tones of yellow Plasticine on the mainly black individual heads from the advertisements, forces the viewer to confront the notion that stereotypes of blackness still remain as embedded signposts today. In every frame of *eXelento* and Gallagher's other large works, the yellow Plasticine, if viewed as a metaphor for white power and manipulation, can be read amongst other things as a superimposition on black identity. In this way repetition and revision can be found either literally in her materials, through processes of layering, and repetition of subject matter, or as metaphors for lived experience through temporal mutation and transformation.

⁷¹ Peter Urban, *The Karate Dojo: Traditions and Tales of a Martial Art*, (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1967), p.1.

⁷² Stilson, (2009).

Gender, Blondenness, and The Middle Passage

Gallagher uses images of both men and women in her work, but I would argue they are treated and presented in subtly different ways. Her male character of Ahab, known also as Peg Leg, emerges from her interest in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*.⁷³ In *Bird in Hand* (2006)[Figure 5.8], Ahab stands amidst numerous dark fronds, and his bandaged and red wooden leg is cut through with tentacular creatures. This acts as a reminder of the narrative associated with him; his relentless wait for revenge and retribution on the whale Moby Dick that has partly devoured him. Gallagher has drawn on a myth created by the Detroit-based electronic musicians of the Drexciya project, and which Greg Tate describes as: 'a microgenre of European electronia,'⁷⁴ Drexciya is a fictional aquatic world where the embryonic offspring of pregnant slaves jettisoned during the Middle Passage have adapted to their underwater environment; a place that can be seen as characterised by loss, fragmentation and hybridity. Fredrik Liew argues: "Drexciya declared their soundscapes were created by channelling aural hallucinations made up of messages or echoes from the Middle Passage," and which they called Unknown Audio Objects (UAOs). He continues: "As a result of these various and unknowable forms of automation, listeners cannot assume a transparent relationship between musician and composition. Therefore, identification becomes unreliable."⁷⁵ Ana Nunes claims the rooting of Ahab on the seabed is invested with movement rather than stasis and,

⁷³ First published in 1851, and considered to be *the* great American novel.

⁷⁴ Greg Tate, 'Are You Free Or Are You A Mystery?' in Ellen Gallagher, *Coral Cities*, (Liverpool and Dublin: Tate and Hugh Lane Gallery, 2007), pp. 17-29 (p.18). James Stinson (1969-2002) and Gerald Donald (dates unknown) created the myth of Drexciya, making several records, (singles and albums) during a ten-year period from 1992.

⁷⁵ Fredrik Liew, 'Eclipse: Art in A Dark Age, 31 May -24 August 2008', *Moderna Museet*, <<http://www.modernamuseet.se/en/Stockholm/Exhibitions/2008/Eclipse---Art-in-a-Dark-Age/Artists-biographies/Ellen-Gallagher/>> [accessed 24 February 2011]

drawing on Karen Alexander's critique of *Bird in Hand*, she suggests that his mission is to forage for lost and discarded black souls, which are "scattered on the surface."⁷⁶ In her interpretation those female slaves who were either thrown overboard or jumped ship, rather than resting in peace on the ocean floor, are depicted as underwater captives in turmoil. This work resonates with notions of dispersal and the violence of the natural world in its continuous cycle of rebirth and disintegration of the physical body.

An enormous cloud of watery curlicues and tendrils bubble upwards and outwards in this underwater explosion of (a form of) hair from Ahab/Peg-Leg's dreadlocked head. Gallagher has collaged fragments of magazine advertisements of women's hairstyles, text and individual letters amongst other things within the bubbling mass. Taking into account Nunes' claim of lost female souls routed from their watery grave, these fragmented faces appear imbued with other-worldliness, moving between the world below and the world above. Gallagher has said that her interest is in more than locating 'being' inside the body, and I suggest she can also be seen to be concerned with notions of 'being' as located outside the body; and which I argue might be seen to function on several levels.⁷⁷ If the body in the form of Ahab is taken as analogous with the historic period of slavery, when to be black meant conscription into a white body of power, then after slavery, after what Gallagher terms the 'explosion', both white and black can be seen to fragment and intermingle in the aftermath. It is suggestive of embodied experiences from the nineteenth century onwards following the end of slavery, and amalgamations of cultures,

⁷⁶ Ana Nunes, 'Disembodiments: Ellen Gallagher's Watery Metamorphoses', in *Imagining The Black Female Body: Reconciling Image in Print and Visual Culture*, ed. by Carol E Henderson, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishers, 2011), p. 48. Karen Alexander, 'A Challenge to History: Ellen Gallagher's Coral Cities', in Gallagher, (2007), pp. 71-8 (p. 77).

⁷⁷ Morgan, (2001), p. 26.

mingling in the after- or below-life; a watery heaven or hell. Read another way, blackness can also be seen as what Tate describes as “an identity flux that freely and freakily oscillates between slave and citizen, fugitive and ghost.”⁷⁸

In this framing of hair, time, race, and gender can be seen to explode into subtle ambiguities, with gendered references to the underground and marginal in Drexciya, as well as to more mainstream cultural histories that include male, female, black, white and hybrid confusions of all of these. *Bird in Hand* has inspired several other divergent readings. In an analogy with the sea-faring Cape Verdeans who gathered salt, writer and poet Cherry Smyth reads this work through notions of consumption. Although she suggests blackness has been consumed by white culture, often as entertainment, (here she may be referring to minstrel shows, and which I discuss later), she also describes the work as having “the untamed energy of a spreading myth, yet is meticulously controlled.”⁷⁹ This may be an allusion to Cape Verdean slaves who became sailors and captains, who sold salt to white communities, and who by their own initiatives created their own histories, or she may be referring to how Gallagher’s interest in how jazz music riffs within certain combinations of notes.

Tate also takes up a reference to jazz in his reading of Gallagher’s work in *Coral Cities* (*Bird in Hand* was part of this exhibition). He maintains that the power and truth of music or science fiction has the ability to break down barriers more efficiently as a tool of communication than words and language. He claims in his

⁷⁸ Tate, in Morgan, (2001), p.12.

⁷⁹ Cherry Smyth, ‘Ellen Gallagher: Salt Eaters’, *Circa*, 117, (2006), 90-1.

complex and forceful essay in the catalogue *Coral Cities*, published at the time of Gallagher's exhibition of the same name.⁸⁰

"The conjuring of Melvillean whiteness as a hollowed and hallowed marker of voids and incubator of absences suggests a nature scrapping with its own capacity for nurturing things unseen."⁸¹

For Tate, science fiction and Detroit techno music can provide liberating spaces that have no white histories. As a pirate, Ahab may remind us of the single-minded slave traders who were part of the histories of the continued and compulsive exertion of white power. However, in *Bird in Hand*, Gallagher meets white evasions and distortions of black identity with her versions and reworkings through erasure, collage, and mutations of gender and race. By collapsing history in these ways, Gallagher produces other fictions and narratives that can be seen as somewhere between the past and the present. She says of her intentions in this work:

"*Bird in Hand* is a piece coming out of *DeLuxe*, but I wanted a single frontal image, but top, bottom didn't matter...I was making out of this detritus something new, a new negro...it's wrong to read it as some kind of a recovery – that's not what it's about, but that's important too. Violent hybridity, not a Utopian hybridity is important for me. Mapping implies a violent control. You can't map without a scalpel. *Bird in Hand* goes back to this idea of travel and alienation, and not letting alienation have a numbing force."⁸²

It could be that Gallagher is referring in the phrase 'violent hybridity' to her use of the scalpel for erasure and collage of the advertisement images. Returning to her quotation about cuts earlier in the chapter, she makes us aware of her need to make physical cuts, and as a woman and an artist she is not alone in this.⁸³ Her work might be seen as literally carving out or mutilating representations of blackness, (from paper and advertisements), as well as conceptually mapping out new territories and

⁸⁰ The exhibition ran from 2007 to 2008 at the Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin, then at Tate Liverpool.

⁸¹ Tate in Ellen Gallagher, (2007), p.29.

⁸² Gallagher and Crawford, (8 April 2010).

⁸³ Annegret Softau has also used a scalpel for drawing and erasure, as I have discussed in Chapter Three.

spaces.⁸⁴ But her reference to this particular concept of a 'violent' hybridity might also confirm Tate's understanding of her work. Finding spaces for blackness in music and the arts more generally could also be explored through a reading of Cixous' *écriture féminine*.⁸⁵ The female body is pivotal for Cixous' argument, as is the premise that 'woman' cannot find a space in language that is not male-centred, since, arguably, language itself is phallogentric. By deconstructing the phallogentric system that Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and later, Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) depend on, Cixous argues that new strategies can be found for the female body and language.⁸⁶ I suggest that this alternative space that she calls *écriture féminine* might be seen to be comparable to the spaces of emancipation that Tate outlines in *Coral Cities*, as well as to the concept of the spaces or interstices within the tropes of blackness. In fact, Cixous makes connections between male/female distinctions and white/black racial distinctions in that both are subjects of a binary system. Where Cixous theorises writing from the female body, poetry being her prime example of a less fixed language, and one that has moved away from systems and structures, one could argue that Tate sees music as an '*écriture noir*'⁸⁷, where a language can be found that comes from the black body without having succumbed to white structures and systems. However, whether in music, poetry, or the visual arts, *écriture féminine* is perceived by Cixous as fluid, and unfixed, conceivable yet indefinable. In considering Gallagher's strategies with hair, her 'mapping' or 'playing' the body (of blackness), and in *Bird in Hand* this is a male body, might be seen to appropriate a concept that is premised on the female body.

⁸⁴ Several contemporary female artists, including Kathy Prendergast, explore notions of mapping in their work.

⁸⁵ Loosely translated as writing the body. Philosophers Luce Irigaray (b. 1932), and Julia Kristeva (b. 1941), are also often associated with the concept of *écriture féminine*, albeit in different ways; Margaret Whitford suggests that Irigaray is more concerned with *parler femme*, (speaking as a woman), rather than writing as a woman, see Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1991)

⁸⁶ Cixous, (Summer 1976), 875-893.

⁸⁷ My phrase, and appropriated from Cixous' term.

By contrast, in 'Mr Terrific' [Figure 5.9], taken from the *DeLuxe* images, Gallagher produces a hybrid male who has taken on a general wig or mask of blond/whiteness, which is much more controlled. She opens areas in the Plasticine hair as one would open a tin with a specially designed tool to roll back the outer layer. This goes some way to framing Mr Terrific as a product in a socio-political act of commodification or consumption; as if his hair literally contains a hidden history that technology has the power to reveal. Fredrik Liew suggests something similar when he says:

"*DeLuxe* presents the capitalist promise of integration as a cruel masquerade."⁸⁸ The numerous worms, balls and stars escaping from these openings in the wig are reminiscent of the inner body, and appear to be of a marine provenance. The imaginative 'Mr Terrific' can be understood primarily as a man of his time, straight out of the mid-twentieth century, but with references to the past, and Gallagher's later work *Bird in Hand* goes some way to being a mythical footnote of 'Mr Terrific' and his contemporaries. Having metaphorically thrown historical moments in the air – or as in *Bird in Hand* in the sea – as they fall, Gallagher coalesces these fragments into different histories.

In Kelley's examination of how Gallagher captures tensions in her work, he explores how masculinity was assigned during the 1970s as nostalgic reassertions of earlier heroisms of the black male, for instance, prize-fighter Jack Johnson, or rancher and breeder of champion cattle Alec Dees. These provide many useful reference points for his reader's entry into black histories, and through those, into the advertisements Gallagher uses in her own images. During the 1970s when radical feminism and gay rights 'threatened' the stronghold of masculinity, black masculinity, according to

⁸⁸ Liew, (2008).

Kelley, underwent its own crisis, at the same time as finding its voice, no longer as 'Negro' but as "the militant, virulent black Man."⁸⁹ He cites an article in *Ebony* (September 1976) that asks whether men should wear jewellery, and in fact this was followed in subsequent issues by letters debating this point.⁹⁰ At a time when black women felt more empowered, traditional male/female roles were increasingly challenged. An advertisement in *Ebony* (December 1976) claims: 'TODAY A WOMAN CAN ACCOMPLISH SO MANY DIFFERENT THINGS. I'M A WIFE AND MOTHER, A STUDENT AT GEORGIA STATE AND I RUN MY OWN BUSINESS. I'M AN AVON REPRESENTATIVE.' While *Mr Terrific* appears to represent the confident black man who seems to have assimilated white bloneness, the inner, and possibly female, body that Gallagher allows us to glimpse suggests complexities that refute this.

Gallagher's images of women are usually models taken from magazines, and the female head is the key image of her transformations. These women are usually unnamed and multiple, and their images resonate with the contradictions and dis/advantages faced by women of colour. As such they echo some historical myths and narratives of black femininity. The Harlem model Mary Cunningham, for instance, of Italian, Negro and Shinnecock Indian descent had a light complexion and soft black hair,⁹¹ and although she might have been seen as a role model for black women with darker skin tones and less acceptable hair than her own, ironically, she was also considered insufficiently 'negroid' for the purposes of advertising bleaches, creams and hair products. To remedy this she applied darker

⁸⁹ Kelley in Fleming (2001), p. 16. Black feminists active during the 1970s include Toni Morrison (b. 1931), Toni Cade Bambara (1939-95), and Alice Walker (b.1944).

⁹⁰ I found this available as full text, online through Google Books. See *Ebony* (December 1976).

⁹¹ See *Jet*, (3 January 1952), available online through Google Books. Dates for Mary Cunningham are unknown.

make-up and had nose surgery.⁹² This example serves to reiterate that black femininity, like black masculinity operated through complex contradictions of embodiment, where physical characteristics of dispersal, that is, in the mixing of races, has historically been seen as unsatisfactory on all sides, being neither black nor white. This compels us to raise the complex social and racial question of what constitutes the 'perfect' black woman in terms of skin tone and hair texture. As one black woman explained to Chris Rock in the film *Good Hair*: "Our self esteem is wrapped up in it. It's a kind of currency even though it's unsustainable and unrealistic."⁹³

Many of the histories of the women in the magazine images Gallagher uses remain unknown. Too numerous to individualise, they often appear as a literal sea of faces. In doing so they might be seen to act as one body or community of women and which, in her large canvases in particular, Gallagher depicts *en masse*.⁹⁴ Her focus on hair, skin and lips asserts strong associations with images of the body rather than the mind, which is traditionally associated with the head. While seeming to play with the notion of a hierarchy of white to black, Gallagher can also be seen to interrogate it seriously. What the magazine models thought of the products they advertised, and the constraints they might have felt as to how they framed their own (mainly black) hair is lost to history yet suggested by her in her revisions. In *Pomp-Bang* (2003) [Figure 5.10], for instance, she styles yellow Plasticine into long flowing shapes, windswept corrugations, and pageboy cuts, see Figures 5.11-5.13. She also models it on heads covered in what appear to be coffee beans and tropical

⁹² Kelley, in Fleming, (2001), pp.13-14.

⁹³ Jeff Stilson, (2009).

⁹⁴ Iris Marion Young's theories of social communities might also be considered relevant here. See my discussion in Chapter Two. Young explores how women experience commonalities, and the notion of interchangeability with others who are similarly positioned, but not necessarily as part of a group, Young, (Spring 1994), p. 726.

leaves [Figures 5.14 and 5.15], as well as more fantastical forms, and interspersing eyes and wave-forms, these latter can be seen as references to the ill-fated journeys of the Middle Passage.

In *Watery Ecstatic* (2007a) [Figure 5.16], which directly references experiences of the Middle Passage, Gallagher's treatment of the female is again through multiple revisions rather than as dispersal from a single source such as in *Bird in Hand*. Where Ahab symbolises Man at his blackest and most mysterious, (by his skin colour and metaphorically as despotic slaver), Gallagher frames hair as a significant visible sign in the dilution of blackness. This idea of dilution is particularly apt in this underwater world where water can absorb, filter and sediment all that is jettisoned. By comparison, 'woman' is presented through many faces in *Watery Ecstatic*. Mouths, cheeks and eyes are reddened, and expressions of pain hint at pathetic stories, lost long ago in bottomless seas. As if rising towards a surface, entangled sinewy tendrils from the female heads suggest fusion with other creatures, and possibilities of emergence, currents and tides, and the power of nature. This idea of coalescing heightens perceptions of their femaleness even as it raises the contested issue of myths of nature, where nature is perceived as female in essentialist theories, and mothering seen as one of birth and succour. In fantasies that *Watery Ecstatic* might suggest to the viewer and the references within the work, human children and other species, even bizarre species of mixed strains of organisms co-exist. And here again, Gallagher depicts these Medusan type women as part bodies; they are all head.

The cut paper works in Gallagher's *Coral Cities* exhibition are exceptional in their detail and repetition of imagery. Female heads morph with fish and seaweed into

fantastical jellied humanoids. The all white collages vie with what were historically perceived as black negroid features, collapsing outdated and potentially offensive notions of race into a sea of barely undifferentiated life. Flowing from the heads are ballooning hairstyles of skeletal fish, jellyfish, knotted kelp and other marine algae interspersed with scales and ovoids. Gallagher refers to her shapes as 'spores'; organisms that carry genetic information and also have the ability to repeat, and it may be in this that correspondences could be found to, say, Dorothy Cross's *Jellyfish* works; that is, in their diverse references to hair.⁹⁵ Hair is again shown as the dominant visual material for her representation of revisions and slippages amongst fictions of the past and present that move between earth and water, gender and race.

When Gallagher performs her repetitions of hair, she draws our attention to 'woman', in particular, as a site of perpetual construction. As Judith Butler has argued:

As a locus of cultural interpretations, the body is a material reality which has already been located and defined within a social context. The body is also the situation of having to take up and interpret that set of received interpretations. No longer understood in its traditional philosophical senses of 'limit' or 'essence', the body is a *field of interpretive possibilities*, the locus of a dialectical process of interpreting anew a historical set of interpretations which have become imprinted in the flesh. The body becomes a peculiar nexus of culture and choice, and 'existing' one's body becomes a personal way of taking up and reinterpreting received gender norms.⁹⁶

Butler's examinations of the construction of the gender spectrum might, as both Stuart Hall and Bridget Byrne suggest, also serve as a model in the domain of race.⁹⁷ Byrne, for example, argues that Butler's approach to gender has important

⁹⁵ Goodeve, (2001), p. 9.

⁹⁶ Judith Butler, 'Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*', *Yale French Studies*, 72, (1986), 35-49 (p. 45). (Butler's emphasis.)

⁹⁷ *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. by Stuart Hall, and Paul du Gay, (Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage, 1996), p.15. Bridget Byrne, *White Lives: The Interplay of 'Race', Class and Gender in Everyday Life*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

implications for the analysis of race when race is considered to be performative as both a concept and as an embodied experience, and which is constructed through repetition and reiteration of racialised discourses.⁹⁸ I suggest that Gallagher's representations of race evoke such philosophical and cultural interpretations. Blemishes in her modeling of Plasticine, for instance, attest to physical sites still under construction, and the significance of actions and products implicit in revisions of hair, regardless of whether considered 'good' or 'bad' hair, is central to her work. That is to say these conceptual notions appear to play off cracks and breaches of the concrete, physical body.

Gallagher's models of bloneness can be seen to add to the long history of blonde hair chronicled in Western myths from Lorelei and fairytale princesses to Roman prostitutes.⁹⁹ During the first and second centuries B.C. these Roman women were compelled to wear either a yellow wig or dye their own hair yellow (although this led to confusion when yellow became fashionable).¹⁰⁰ In the twentieth century, the preferred combination of blonde-hair and blue eyes signified to the Nazi regime the apogee of a 'master' race, while as a symbol of glamour even today the power of Hollywood blondes remains an influential legacy. Laine Burton's research on the notion of a blonde paradox highlights an interesting dilemma when the 'bottle' blonde realises the negative stigmas attached to hair colour, but accepts them as a downside that is outweighed by the positive aspects bloneness is perceived to carry.¹⁰¹ Burton proposes that women who 'subscribe' to bloneness, must also

⁹⁸ Byrne, (2006), p.13.

⁹⁹ Bloneness is also discussed in relation to myth, and the girl-child in Alice Maher's work in Chapter Two.

¹⁰⁰ Cooper, (1971), p. 122.

¹⁰¹ Burton, (2006). <<http://www4.gu.edu.au:8080/adt-root/uploads/approved/adt-QGU20070122.110616/public/02Whole.pdf>> [accessed 6 January 2011] Burton's study is through a white lens, and references the performance artist Vanessa Beecroft's art of 'performing' bloneness, (Beecroft b. 1969, Italy.)

accede to its cultural codes, although, conceivably, not all women may have consciously examined their motives for changing their hair colour. She makes the following point:

“Blondeness has and continues to be communicated as a symbol, a sign, and a code representing a value system, a nexus of gender, power and race distinctions within the body politic.”¹⁰²

Whilst many scholars, including Warner, Pitman,¹⁰³ and Burton, have explored the myths that have arisen around blondeness, its significance in this chapter can be argued mainly in relation to issues of race. Gen Doy says of the composite of black skin and blonde hair:

“The black blonde immediately signifies transgressive hybridity and rejection of ‘the natural’, as well as disturbing the usual ideological expectations of whiteness and blondeness.”¹⁰⁴

When blondeness is associated with straighter, shinier, (more ‘natural-looking’, that is, more ‘white-looking’) hair, for the woman with black hair in an unaltered state that is described as ‘natural’, then ‘natural’ is often perceived as a derogatory term. Women with black hair have been and continue to be led to believe media representations of beauty (taking into account skin and hair), where white/blonde is privileged over black/black.¹⁰⁵ From a survey of black women voicing their views on black hair, Ingrid Banks pursues the thorny issue of natural and unnatural. One of her interviewees gets to the crux of the matter when she says: “I think it is a big issue for blacks, I think we make it a big issue.”¹⁰⁶ Gallagher’s strategies of repeatedly using yellow Plasticine might be seen to mirror this view as her work can

¹⁰² Burton, (2006).

¹⁰³ Joanna Pitman, *On Blondes*, London: Bloomsbury, (2003).

¹⁰⁴ Doy, (2000), p. 190.

¹⁰⁵ Cooper contends that skin and hair are the two most significant physical attributes for racial classification, Cooper (1971), p.20.

¹⁰⁶ Banks, (2000), p. 26.

be seen as both complying with and challenging racial ideologies of bloneness associated with whiteness, as hair “ emerges as a body within the social body.”¹⁰⁷ That is to say, in social meanings of the body, as argued by Judith Butler amongst others, the body is a rich site from which to draw.¹⁰⁸ As one of the most visible parts of the body, hair is critical to definitions of the self within the overall corpus.

Gallagher’s revisions of bloneness also reveal the ability of hair to operate as a separate social phenomenon, where black hair through its versatility plays bloneness in another game. In this way, difference is less concerned with adaptation, and more with privileging black hair as a site of empowerment.¹⁰⁹ Banks’ research shows that for some black women at the beginning of the twenty-first century, black hair in its natural state is potentially subversive of white validations of black hair. Almost a revolutionary act, keeping hair natural signals a stance against socio-political issues of the black body. As part of this, having the confidence to be able to make choices is also a mark of empowerment. Similarly ‘good’ and ‘bad’ hair may then be seen to be as much about issues of race and hair type as; “ a favoritism that we took up from the white man and continued,” as about perceptions of ‘women’s issues’ (such as beauty).¹¹⁰ *Pomp-Bang, eXelento* and Gallagher’s other canvases of yellow-haired images can be seen to explore questions of race-based gender while furthering a dialogue that remains as pertinent in the twenty-first century as it did during and after slavery.

Gallagher’s constantly evolving imagery in these works is linked directly to hair and wigs, and particularly in her large canvases, it can be seen to reference distinctions

¹⁰⁷ Banks, (2000), p. 26.

¹⁰⁸ Butler, (1993).

¹⁰⁹ This idea is informed by Banks’ insights.

¹¹⁰ Banks, (2000), p. 30.

between black and blond/white. She explained her approach to the black body and blondeness in 2001: "It's just too late in history for us to see these black blonde ladies as symbols of black women in 'white' hair. They are black ladies with blonde hair."¹¹¹ She can be seen to suggest by this that as a symbol or ideology black 'woman' has moved beyond her histories, and in the twentieth century (which is when Gallagher made this point), black women can be seen in other terms. Her penetration of layers of language, and 'skins' of blackness/whiteness, can be seen to mirror her personal biographical strata and, in turn their histories.

The Languages of Hair

Gallagher has already been shown effectively to communicate many of her artistic intentions through her practice, and her work to stimulate descriptive language in theorisations of her art. Smyth, for instance, rather poetically describes Ahab/Peg-Leg's hair as; "tributaries of collaged magazine ads shaped like seaweed tendrils that proliferate like tongues of broken but beautiful speech."¹¹² Gallagher's use of textural material in her collages also reveals her engagement with scripted language, and by examining a selection of individual images from *Preserve*, *eXelento*, *DeLuxe*, and the *Coral Cities* series, I attempt to uncover variations in this language between the works. The earliest of these, *Preserve*, dates from 2002, and the words Gallagher includes are often based around social characters and commentary on the products advertised. 'Karate' [Figure 5.6], tells us JUDO-JUI-JITSU-SAVATE IS A TOTAL SELF-DEFENSE SYSTEM, and she titles the wigs and styles in this image with captions such as LIONESS, CAPLESS JOY, FREEDOM WIG, GYPSY DARLING, AND NEVER NEEDS SETTING. These might suggest that the wig can have a protective function for black

¹¹¹ Goodeve, (2001), p. 35.

¹¹² Cheryl Smyth, (2006), pp. 90-91.

identity, and evoke possibilities of courage and self control; the lion and gypsy can be seen as metaphors of this.

Gallagher uses other strategies in *eXelento*; many of the magazine pages have been enlarged or cropped. Accordingly, the printed text has also been clipped from the top, bottom or sides. Legibility becomes a concern when meaning of the sometimes difficult-to-read words is confusing and unstable. In practice, the rationality of the advertisements and the functions of the products become questionable. Raising doubts as to their claims, the de-constructed language of black hairstyling and products in relation to the yellow Plasticine metaphor of bloneness can be seen to reveal incoherence and inconsequentiality. Not only do Gallagher's strategies with hair call attention to the cultural devices of artifice, including masking or disguising, but she can also be seen to suggest, and carry out through her techniques of cutting, ruthless histories of violence to the body.

The textual language Gallagher uses evoke malapropisms and childish language that enables connections between black hair, blackface dialect and minstrelsy. As Eric Lott has argued in connection with the latter: "Early minstrel songs simultaneously produced and muted the physical power of black men coded by such events. Exaggerations or distortions of dialect, or gestures meant to underscore the complete nonsense of some songs might effectively dampen any too boisterous talk."¹¹³ In 1930, A.A. Brill writing in *Popular Science* made clear his views on blackface when he suggested its comedy value came from recognition of the distance the white adult has placed between themselves and their childhood. In addition, this use of language caricaturing 'negro' dialect increases its resemblance to childish language, making it

¹¹³ Lott, (1993), p. 119.

doubly amusing for its target audience. Naming the language of another as infantile effectively diminishes the status of the speaker, (something that historically was associated with blackface dialect).¹¹⁴

Another strategy Gallagher uses is in the unspoken social commentary that runs through the individual frames, where words are omitted, but are nevertheless implied in the structure and repetition of the work as a whole. In Figure 5.17 (a frame from *eXelento*), we are told the name and price of the wig, signifying it as a product, which by implication commodifies the wearer of the wig. In this particular frame that has the by-line, 140. BACK CLUSTER OF CURLS, the wig masks the face completely, making it appear more important than its wearer. The yellow Plasticine is moulded into a heavy-duty boot print, suggesting the unspoken phrase 'down-trodden', and potentially signifying violence against the body, or the lasting effects of slavery. Obliteration of the face by a wig such as this raises issues of disguise and masking, and blackness can be seen as both an active and a passive grammar hiding and being hidden behind a white façade. In Figure 5.18, again from *eXelento*, the intimation in the headline DEMOCRACY AND CRAFTSMANSHIP SEWN RIGHT IN! is supported by the Plasticine modelling of the heads of two women under a joint wig of both dollar and broken dollar signs. We are made aware of the notion of the cost to the body, and the shaping of women's consciousness that hair places on black women. An interviewee of Banks, who she names as Ann, highlights the inconvenience of time-consuming grooming with, what she and many of her friends

¹¹⁴ A.A. Brill, 'Amos and Andy Explained', *Popular Science*, (June 1930), pp. 22, 23, 120-122. Charles J. Correll and Freeman F. Gosden were the comedians who played under the names Amos and Andy, respectively. *Popular Science* is available online on Google Books, and its target audience appears to have been white American (men) with scientific interests. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it was popular with all audiences, although the *Pittsburgh Courier* mounted a campaign in 1931 against Andy and Amos. Their content became more inflammatory during the 1940s and was taken off air in 1951. < <http://jeff560.tripod.com/amos2.html> > [accessed 16 February 2011]

consider to be, the material characteristics of unmanageable hair, and the buying into a 'European stereotype'. Ann relives her experiences of how hair affected her childhood in the mid-twentieth century:

"You went to the beauty shop before you went to church, so that meant for us, especially for kids, you chewed up two, or three, or four, maybe three, or four or five hours out of your day at the weekend in the beauty shop...And that was a normal way of life...When I use the word 'issue', my operational definition is something that you have to work your life around."¹¹⁵

Gallagher's headline about democracy and craftsmanship, notions of inclusion and self-esteem, although appearing to suggest practices of integration into the American economy and society, are confounded by a suggestion of stamping out its implementation. Instead, the Plasticine dollars can be seen as a metaphor of white power over black.

In an adjacent frame [Figure 5.19] a woman's sightless face peering out from behind two short curtains of hair is covered in skin whitener, apart from two dark areas around her eyes, with the ironic text NICER THINGS HAPPEN WITH BRIGHTER, CLEARER SKIN! Rather than taking on whiteness as 'natural', blackness can be seen to mock itself, much as minstrelsy did. Several of the frames satirise American ideals of beauty; in one a sightless black face is hidden deep behind several layers of a heart-shaped Plasticine wig, which Gallagher has stamped or embossed, almost like the indentations and holes in a horseshoe. Beside this a self-assured white man gazes up at the woman's face, and underneath, the caption, THE PRETTIEST 'VALENTINES' HAVE LIGHTER BRIGHTER SKIN. The wig, more a porthole than a fashion accessory, again appears to be designed to hide as much black skin as possible, and induces ideas of disguise, not only of the skin, but the very being of blackness.

¹¹⁵ Banks, (2000), p.154.

Two works from the *Coral Cities* exhibition, *Watery Ecstatic* (2001) [Figure 5.20], and *Watery Ecstatic* (2007b) [Figure 5.21], are both white on white collage cut-outs. Although, more nebulous in their connections to hair, they can be seen to reference it through metaphorical association and physical characteristics.¹¹⁶ In both these pieces a central fugitive mass in white is subtly brought into relief on the page, and surrounded by words flowing outwards as hair, ripples or rays might. These words and phrases include FULL CAP, HARLEQUIN, APOLLO, LA SHEER, THE FIRST LADY, NU-NILE, SPIRAL LUSTRE, GLAMOUR BOB, AND PIXETTE, and reference hairdos and wigs that Gallagher has charted and archived elsewhere in grid formats. The words in *Watery Ecstatic* (2001) appear to name each unseen inlet around a coastline, while those in *Watery Ecstatic* (2007) emanate as crepuscular rays from a twilight sun, where the last contrasts between light and dark succumb to either one or the other; in this piece, to the whiteness of the paper that is written through with black.

Like any good storyteller, Gallagher draws us in by her exuberant fantasies of multilayered worlds. One of the ways she does this is through her strategies with both subtle and more obvious images and evocations of hair. Her compulsion for variation also occurs within the words and phrases of those stories she chooses to repeat. She says of her work:

“Each sort of whimsical obliteration or recovery would be created into a kind of structure or language, back and forth. That was really exciting, in terms of looking at my work and my language, and having it mean something even in its refusals to be completely readable. There’s this call and response that you actually feel directly as you’re working in this kind of collaboration.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ As I argued for Kathy Prendergast’s map pieces in Chapter Four.

¹¹⁷ Ellen Gallagher in conversation with Art21.

<<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/gallagher/clip1.html>> [accessed 14 January 2011.]

In effect, Gallagher is suggesting that her improvisations (and she gives as examples obliterating the names of the characters or blindfolding them), are repeated throughout all the frames as a structuring feature of the language of that piece. I suggest that the call and response between her work and herself can be seen conceptually to situate the artist and her work as a cooperating force or unit, and reiterates what I suggested earlier in the chapter about how she literally positions herself on the canvas when she is working.

Irish Blackness

How might Irish blackness be seen in Gallagher's framing of hair? To answer this question some historical background between Irishness and blackness may be useful. The period known as the golden age of British pictorial satire between the late eighteenth century into the nineteenth century was a time when illustrators and printmakers such as Thomas Rowlandson (1756-1827) and James Gillray (1757-1815) were active caricaturists. As artists they not only satirised Georgian society and its politicians, but also "rioters, radicals, and rebels with long faces, wild eyes, snub noses, flaring nostrils, cavernous mouths, and jutting jaws."¹¹⁸ Their drawings and prints expressed a general notion of disgust and baseness about a politicised underclass, but in the last years of the eighteenth century (following the Irish Rebellion against the British in 1798) Gillray and some of his contemporaries began to illustrate the Irish in particular as brutish peasants with snub noses and thick upper lips.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ See L. Perry Curtis Jr. *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*, (Washington and London: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), particularly Chapter IV 'Simianizing the Irish Celt', pp. 29-57.

¹¹⁹ Johann Caspar Lavater (1741-1801), a Swiss physiognomist and theologian, preached that the facial features in particular, allowed a reading of a person's character. See Curtis Jr. (1997), p. xix.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Irish were being stereotyped in cartoons as simianised rebels on both sides of the Atlantic. The most exaggerated cartoons usually included a prognathous and hairy face with sharp teeth, and an accompanying raised shillelagh or clay pipe, depicting a demonised, bestialised troglodyte, whose aim was to subvert law and order.¹²⁰ Comparison between this representation of Irishness to apes, gorillas and other simians, was only a small step in the Victorian imagination. Associations were formed between Irishness, apes and monsters including anarchistic images of Guy Fawkes, Frankenstein, and Devil-fish.¹²¹ A caricature from that time, by the American Thomas Nast, *The Ignorant Vote: Honors Are Easy*, (9 December 1876) [Figure 6.22],¹²² portrays an emancipated slave from the South carrying as much political weight as a white Irish American.¹²³ For readers of the journal *Harper's Weekly* in which this drawing appeared, illustrations such as this might be seen to confirm a political consensus, irrevocably binding these two groups together.

Inter-racial recognition between black/Irish occurred during the time of blackface minstrelsy, which began around 1830 and was at its most popular between 1846-54 in North America. Blackface material arose from the material relations of slavery, from attempts to portray it as amusing and natural. In a sourcebook on minstrelsy, a section about wigs notes the following:

¹²⁰ The shillelagh and clay pipe are symbols of Irish culture, the former is a stereotypical symbol of a rebellious nature, given to violence, while the latter traditionally were produced in Ireland and were very popular at wakes (funeral ritual).

¹²¹ See Curtis Jnr, (1997), pp. 29-57.

¹²² Nast was born in Germany in 1840 and emigrated to America aged six with his family, where he died in 1902.

¹²³ Paul Spickard makes the point that there were relatively few portrayals emanating from America of the Irish being anything different to other Whites; it was the British that mostly depicted the Irish as 'other'. This may well have been based on the colonial relationship between Britain and Ireland. See Paul Spickard, *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race, and Colonialism, in American History and Identity*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 124-5.

"All dealers in theatrical supplies furnish negro minstrel wigs at fair prices...However, if it not convenient to purchase your wig, you can make a very fair substitute in the following manner: Secure a tight fitting, black skull cap, made of light but strong cloth, and cover it with curled hair, such as is used for filling mattresses. For an end man's wig, the style may be as fantastic as you wish."¹²⁴

Minstrelsy gave both the black performer and the Irish minstrel cultural recognition and for the latter, Eric Lott says it was a means of cultural representation from behind the mask.¹²⁵ As the Irish and the blackface became closer through the mixing of musical instruments and lyrics and their shared experiences of oppression, the greater hostilities became between them.¹²⁶ Lott's investigation into minstrelsy and the American working class reveals amongst other things a deep-seated complex of combinations and contradictions whereby fascination vied with fear, and stereotyping with recognition.

Whilst Gallagher's imagery does not immediately appear to be drawn from her Irish ancestry, she makes clear her feelings on the issue when she says; "There is a tendency to erase my Irish family, so that it doesn't contaminate people's narrow definition of blackness."¹²⁷ Given her background, it could be argued that her use of wigs, for instance in *eXelento* and her other large canvases, might also evoke transformations between blackness/Irishness that could be interpreted in relation to minstrelsy as well as to the Middle Passage, and more contemporary socio-cultural issues. Critical literature on Gallagher's work that examines in any detail connections between Irish/blackface is limited; Goodeve only signals an interest in Gallagher's Irish-black connection without delving further into how this is

¹²⁴ *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*, ed. by Annemarie Bean, James Vernon Hatch, and Brooks McNamara, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), p. 124.

¹²⁵ Lott, (1993), p. 95.

¹²⁶ Lott, (1993), p. 95. The popular character of Jim Crow in these shows also contributed to the complex and contradictory relationship between black/Irish.

¹²⁷ Gallagher quoted in Goodeve, (2001), p. 38.

represented in the artworks.¹²⁸ Mark van der Walle comments that Gallagher demolishes the minstrel show into its component parts of eyes and mouths, and her gallery, Hauser and Wirth, point out in their biographical details that she merges specific cultural references with her background as a black Irish American woman.¹²⁹

However, I suggest that it is conceivable her amendments and reworkings of hair might be seen as calling attention to inter-racial recognition and power relations between blackness and Irishness. In 1997 she remarked in an interview with Peter Halley that she understood the minstrel show as a primal site of repetition where the same acts are performed again and again to hysterical laughter feeding adult desires.¹³⁰ She explains her main interest in it to be in the slippage between the language surrounding minstrelsy imagery, rather than the imagery itself, as a place where issues of racism and class strictures can be explored. She says of these spaces of language: "Even in terms of Irish people, in the playbooks you can find a lot of slippage between the motherland being someplace in Ireland, being Africa."¹³¹ Adult desires, such as those of gay or hip hop cultures during the 1970s and 80s can also be seen to identify through slippage with the black (male) body, and which enabled access to mainstream acceptance. Although I may have oversimplified these scenarios, it could be argued that Gallagher is alluding to her Irish ancestry when she says, "Everybody else has been able to pass through the doorway but the African."¹³²

¹²⁸ Goodeve, (1998), pp. 19-20.

¹²⁹ Mark van der Walle, 'Openings: Ellen Gallagher', *Art Forum International*, (February 1996). Hauser & Wirth have galleries in London, New York and Zurich. < <http://www.hauserwirth.com/> > [accessed 4 August 2011]

¹³⁰ Halley, (1997).

¹³¹ Halley, (1997).

¹³² Halley, (1997).

More recently, Lauren Onkey explores how Irish writer Roddy Doyle can be seen to reawaken racial discourses between black/Irish in his novel *The Commitments*.¹³³ She suggests this occurs partly through Doyle's strategy of turning his fictional band from playing post-New Wave music to soul music, as 'a new version of an old song'.¹³⁴ Doyle's revival of the issue of race suggests that in his fiction: "the black-Irish trope was at work again, in perhaps more complex ways than ever, and that there were new histories emerging that might change how the meaning of Irishness could be understood with regard to African Americans in the United States."¹³⁵ As discussed earlier, parallels can be drawn between Irish and African/American cultures around notions of oppression, suffering, and racism, and this chapter has done so through the trope of minstrelsy. I suggest a similar correspondence might be posited between Doyle's tactics and Gallagher's aesthetic approach a decade later.

Gallagher's strategies with hair and wigs might be seen to follow Lott's idea of 'love' and 'theft' during blackface minstrelsy when he quotes Frederick Douglass's famous words on blackface minstrels:

"The filthy scum of white society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow-citizens."¹³⁶

'Love' and 'theft' refer back to my earlier point about tensions between the cross-racial desire and the shared experiences of Irishness with blackness that fluctuates between identification and loathing. The potency of these two notions, bound

¹³³ Roddy Doyle, *The Commitments*, first published 1987.

¹³⁴ Lauren Onkey, *Blackness and Transatlantic Irish Identity*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2010) p.1.

¹³⁵ Onkey, (2010), pp. 1-2.

¹³⁶ Frederick Douglass quoted in Lott, (1993), p. 15. See also the original text from which this quotation was taken in *The North Star*, (27 October 1848)
<<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/minstrel/miaccshp.html>> [accessed 8 January 2011]

together in racial and class dialogues in the nineteenth-century in Irishness and blackness, seem as relevant to Gallagher's contemporary framing of hair as they do to Lott where white fascination with blackness seems to steal its identities. (We know Gallagher is aware of Lott's analysis of this subject because she mentions him briefly in her interview with Peter Halley in 1997.)

Conclusion

This chapter's exploration of how Ellen Gallagher frames black hair has uncovered complex and dynamic tropes that have been shown as having their roots in African and Irish histories. Using magazine images of black hairstyles and wigs, Gallagher's work can be seen to externalise socio-cultural perceptions and trends of real hairstyles and the lives of real men and women, which remain as relevant today as they did in the mid-twentieth century. Her recourse to grid formats, although often associated with Minimalism, have been shown to have physical origins in her carpentry background, and the magazine images; and it may be that her obsession with them may have as many practical as aesthetic reasons. When Gallagher uses a grid each individual variation or difference of hair is more clearly defined, for example, in *Yellow* [Figure 5.5]. Techniques and strategies with collage not only enable revision and creation of new realities, but they are also reflected in how black hair is styled today through the use of 'weaves'. Weaves are often made from hair bought from 'tonsure' ceremonies in India by hair entrepreneurs; black hairstylists in the US then 'collage' these hair extensions by stitching or braiding them into the recipients own hair, or net covering the hair.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Approximately 80% of India's population have their hair tonsured at least twice in their lifetime, and the chief destination of this hair is Los Angeles. Information taken from Stilson (2009).

Gallagher's statements of intention and biographical reference points also make the viewer aware of the importance of the histories of slavery and fictional characters as departure points towards an arrival, not as literal geographical journeys between places, in the interpretation of her work. But, as Édouard Glissant says:

"Arrival is the moment when all the exponents of humanity- not just the African ones – consent to the idea that it is possible to be one and multiple at the same time; that you can be yourself and the Other; that you can be the same and the Different. When that battle – because it is a battle, not a military but a spiritual one – when that battle is won, a great many accidents in human history will have ended, will be abolished."¹³⁸

Black hair and relations of difference are personal for Gallagher, and through this she makes us aware of variations as rhizomatic rather than linear. Her practical application of printed images, penmanship paper, text, and actual printing processes all serve to emphasise notions of rewriting and repetition. When used with hair and diasporic imagery, her text and images are not always immediately legible, which might be seen to reflect our inability to fully understand difference. De Chassey says of hybridity in Gallagher's work: "The forms and signs resulting from this process are thus simultaneously clashing and labile."¹³⁹ He seems to intimate a fragility, in particular of black identity, that arises in the gaps between the desire or need to acquiesce in contemporary societies where black hair is still perceived as 'bad', and 'good' hair, seen as that which fits into white norms and trends (by a black audience as well as a white).

When hair is seen as a metonym for embodiment, then Gallagher's work raises questions as to why discriminatory practices continue to be stimulated and pandered to in the twenty-first century. She offers her own perspective on this through the

¹³⁸ Manthia Diawara, 'Conversation with Édouard Glissant aboard The Queen Mary II (August 2009)', in *Afro Modern: Journeys Through the Black Atlantic*, exh. cat. ed. by Tanya Barson, and Peter Gorschlüter, trans. by Christopher Winks, (London: Tate Liverpool, 2010), pp. 58-63) (p. 59).

¹³⁹ de Chassey, in Gallagher, (2010), p.15.

ways she layers the wig advertisements, and her respect for the individual in her artistic representations. Even though the magazine images are often cropped and deconstructed, she emphasises the importance that some part of the identity of the model is preserved, when she says: "This person's specificity was completely undeniable and unapologetic."¹⁴⁰ Through innumerable additions, subtractions, transformations and revisions, Gallagher's strategies with hair can be seen as affirmations of the fragmentation and dispersal of (black) identity, which she makes visible in cracks, breaches and slippages in language and the body.

¹⁴⁰ <<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/gallagher/clip1.html>> [accessed 21 January 2011]

Conclusion

“Becoming, as opposed to being, stresses mobility and change as fundamental to subjectivity and this fact necessitates finding ways to think and demonstrate process.”¹

In the preceding chapters I have explored three inter-related questions. First, I examined what it is about hair that provides a rich source of meaning in art practices. Second, how it might be seen to evoke or reveal an interest in seriality, and third, and central to this, is the issue of how my chosen artists use hair. Implicit in the final question asked is the issue of why hair is particularly visible in the practices of women artists. The thesis followed an approach informed by theories of difference and the significance of the rhizome by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *écriture féminine* by Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva’s theorisation of abjection. Judith Butler’s deliberations on performativity and identity have also been valuable to this project, while Marsha Meskimmon’s writing on encounters of difference has underpinned some of my thinking.

During this project I found that the further I probed the topic, the more rhizomatic my findings became, and much like the previous literature on hair, complexities and overlaps of meaning became more apparent. Also, as a proliferation of possible interpretations of hair evolved, the more they appeared to resist organisation or categorisation.² My intention was to locate my research within a multifaceted theoretical framework, in which notions of the plurality of hair, including its relationship with the serial, coincide with a closely observed analysis of individual

¹ Meskimmon, (2003), p. 73.

² This effect might be seen as comparable to the Deleuzian concept of the rhizome that he and Guattari developed in *One Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (2004b).

works and their complex metaphorical meanings. I attempted to extend my thinking beyond oppositional and dualistic ideas of identity, in order to explore what part hair, often perceived as a non-traditional material in art practices, might play in an understanding of *écriture féminine*. That is, one that addresses the female body without privileging it unduly, or denying the significance of what Meskimmon calls 'masculine-normative values'.³ In other words, I have attempted to find spaces of difference or transformation in which art made by women can be recognised as resonant with ways of experiencing embodiment that are not simply alternatives to a norm or phallogentric system, but that can extend understanding in relevant and dynamic ways.

My research also involved a brief overview of the previous multi-disciplinary literature on hair, particularly in relation to the beauty industry, anthropological and art historical discourses, and I concluded that hair is indeed widely accepted as one of the most visible signs of identity, rich with complex, multiplicitous suggestions of both the personal and political. Although universally familiar it is often troublesome in the particular, and both resists and accepts physical manipulation. Its styling has been shown to symbolize power and oppression, individuality and similarity. Whilst hair on the head is usually acceptable and even considered beautiful, on the body it may be perceived as repulsive and unattractive. In short, this thesis has shown that the theme continues to stimulate wide-ranging discussions in literature and visual culture, so it is little wonder that hair has been explored as an abundant source of meaning in artistic practices.

³ Meskimmon, (2003), p. 6.

Serial Matter

My second objective was to consider hair in the visual arts in relation to seriality and serial strategies, and this exploration of the very different practices of my chosen artists has revealed several notions of the serial. Drawing on both Bochner and Fer's scholarship, I have established that hair can be understood as serial matter, and also as a metaphor for the serial, with flows and commonalities between these dual aspects. I have shown that hair can be seen as an embodied material that espouses repetition. As a noun, 'hair' can be used to signify the singular, plural and collective, and this research has indicated how the work of each of my artists can be seen to uncover and explore this morphological feature.

Rijkeboer has said she began collecting and working with actual hair because she found it the most expressive of materials to articulate her reactions to visiting former concentration camps. Her obsession with seriality since 1998, from her *Onschuld* series, right up to her latest works *Working Through the Wolf* and *Beyond the Wolf* (both 2011, and which are not discussed in this thesis) [Figures 1.30 and 1.31], has been a constant in her art practice. Her techniques with hair include spinning, knitting, crochet and felting, and its characteristic plurality has enabled her to create her own material from its detritus. Alice Maher was already interested in the possibilities of material as a site of seriality when she began collecting hair. This occurred during a period in her life that was characterised to some extent by movement between two places (Cork and Belfast); the former can be considered as symbolic of home for Maher since it is not far from where she grew up (and with all that might entail, including the familiar, local traditions, and folktales), and the latter (Belfast) as symbolic of branching out through rhizomatic movement. Her practices

of accumulating hair (and other materials) have been shown to echo her encouragement of the accumulation of dialogues and interpretations that have arisen in theorisations of her work.

I have explored Annegret Soltau's recourse to hair as a serial material that can be traced in her earlier and later use of line as relating to the haptic. She began with outlines and impressions of lines that mutated into drawn lines as hair and other wrappings, while her later use is visible through stitching and erasure. Soltau's collecting of hair for *Meine Verlorenen Haare*, [Figure 3.14] over the period of a year during a personal crisis has been shown to function as a means of emotional expression rooted in experiences of the self, in contrast with Rijkeboer's engagement with hair that was partly as a response to the visual and sensate historicizing of traumatic events.

I have suggested that in Kathy Prendergast's art practices hair evokes the domestic spaces of home and personal spaces of family. In *The End and The Beginning II* [Figure 4.8], for instance, it has been explored as a *memento mori* of the generational line between her mother, self and son. Her *Love Table* [Figure 4.9] and *Love Object* [Figure 4.10] simultaneously evoke notions of the abjected body and the poignancy of relationships; the latter is particularly emphasized in her titles. Using hair as a sculptural material enables Prendergast to depict identity as relational, precarious, and suggestive of loss. To my knowledge Ellen Gallagher has never used actual hair in any of her pieces, but her repeated adaptations of magazine images of hair, for instance, in *DeLuxe* [Figure 5.1] and *eXelento* [Figure 5.2], persistently refer to black hair, a trope of enormous significance throughout her oeuvre. I have demonstrated that her preoccupation with seriality reflects black experiences of both hair and body

that arise as a result of both internal and external social and cultural pressures, powers and expectations.

Hair as Metaphor

It has been indicated throughout this research that hair as embodied matter can be seen to unlock substantial and rich topics across many disciplines. In Chapter One I explored hair as a metaphor for notions of innocence and loss in Rijkeboer's work, for instance in *Installatie Onschuld* [Figure 1.8] and other pieces in this series. Hair was also shown to sustain metaphoric associations with categorisation and segregation of identity through racial or gender divisions, as proposed in *Het Oordeel* [Figure 1.1] and *Heaven or Hell I, II and III* [Figure 1.21]. I also discussed its potential in the symbolisation of family and gender, particularly in *Home Sweet Home* [Figure 1.9] and *Burka* [Figure 1.11] Rijkeboer's treatment of hair in *Baalbushka* and *Babooska* [Figure 1.22] and the *Stolen Identities* and *Avatar* series has also enabled discussions of hair as a metaphor for various issues concerning identity and cloning, including the liability of identity to theft and alteration. I suggested that this is particularly potent when hair is interpreted as a genetic footprint of individual DNA.

Hair's powerful association to the body makes it a prime site of abjection that brings into focus the boundaries of body and reminds us of the 'horror' of its waste and fragmentation. Maher's use of hair in *Folt* [Figure 2.2] for instance, reminds us of this aspect. I considered how her drawings of neat hairstyles in a grid format contrast with her use of actual hair (as a detrital and unkempt trace of the body), with specific associations to the female through its length and sensuality. I also indicated how Maher's initial collecting of hair has been shown to support her fascination with the

marginalisation of the female, drawing on several socio-cultural and historic connotations, including its relevance in fairytales and myths, and its occupation of a liminal role. In *Familiar 1* [Figure 2.3] I examined the historical relevance of women's work and received notions of women, and her attempts to subvert notions of modernism and postmodernism through her use of flax as a metaphor for hair. Taking this argument forward by correlating hair, gender and seriality into an exploration of women as a collective,⁴ I examined how Young distinguishes a series from a group. In the process, Maher's obsession with adding layers of meaning to her works was un/consciously perpetuated; my exploration of her work began with hair and its relation to the natural world and, through investigating her complex and allusive imagery, I tentatively came to consider the possibility that by drawing on a Deleuzian reading of flows, Maher can be seen to challenge constructed ideologies of 'woman'.

I explored how, in Soltau's work, hair as abject matter can articulate fears and anxieties about the body. In *Meine Verlorenen Haare* [Figure 3.14] disintegration through hair loss might be seen as a metaphor for the vulnerability and fracturing of identity, particularly in the context of pregnancy, where expulsion of the child from the matriarchal body mirrors the life cycle in which death and life are inseparable. I also established metaphorical connections between her use of hair to line and thread. In Soltau's early pencil drawings, including *Umschlossene (Enclosed)* and *Umschlossener Kopf (Enclosed Head)* [Figures 3.2 and 3.3], line not only represents hair, but also acts as a metaphor of constriction (of the body). In her performances associated with the *Selbst* series of works, I explored the haptic mutation of line into threads as she actively connects and constrains the human form. These notions of

⁴ The point I am making here returns to my earlier point about the etymology of the word hair.

relation and restriction are also indicated in her video *La Mamma*, where I suggested that Soltau uses the pronounced sound of scissors cutting hair as an analogy to the cutting of the umbilical line between mother and child. In her controversial photostitching series *Generativ* [Figure 3.1] I argued that the line in the form of black thread, articulates not only a familial line between her grandmother, mother, self and daughter, but demonstrates its ability to metaphorically suggest that youth, maturing and ageing are not simplistic stages in the life cycle but relations of difference. I also examined how Soltau draws on her own dental treatment to explore issues of global conflict, torture and injury to the (female) body, for instance in *NY Faces- chirurgische Operationen* [Figures 3.25 and 3.26]. I suggest that these works can be read as metaphorical negotiations of trauma as depicted in physical mutilations and stitchings of the fragmented body.

I suggested in Prendergast's *Love Table* that when head and hair are disconnected such as in a tress of hair, and when interpreted as a symbol of the abject body, they can be suggestive of diasporic detachment. By drawing on various ideologies and understandings of Ireland as 'woman', I showed that Prendergast's inscription of the female body as landscape in *Seabed* [Figure 4.3] enables possible new meanings of and spaces for 'woman'. I also pursued exploratory readings of hair associated with strategies of mapping in relation to a human geography of place, time and self in her *City Drawing* series. Prendergast offers her viewer clues, including her technique with line and other mapping strategies which, when combined with their scale as 'portraits', facilitate new connections between the city and hair. Taking as read the more obvious connection between the city and its inhabitants, I made correlations between city networks and routes to neural pathways, and between movement in cities to physical energies of bodies. I concluded that forms of stasis and dynamic

flexibility are necessary to both, and through this more conjectural reasoning of hair find connections to other ideologies of embodied space, in particular that of 'woman' and Irishness.

Chapter Five discussed how Gallagher's use of hair can be seen as metonymic of the black body as her work destabilizes preconceptions of dualistic notions of black/white in relation to imagery from popular culture, the Middle Passage and minstrelsy. I considered the ways she uses hair through repetition and revision as suggestive of consumerism, commodification and dis/empowerment, and her materials, particularly yellow Plasticine, as a metaphor of both malleability and bloneness. I argued that her use of fragmented textual references to hair and the black body, and her use of curlicues and other hair forms, for instance, in *Bird in the Hand* [Figure 5.8] are possible sites of reframing blackness in the interstices in and around the languages of blackness.

The Prevalence of Hair in the Art Practices of Women

An over-arching concern was to examine why so many women who are artists respond to hair, and is perhaps one of the most pertinent issues of this research project. I explored this question through a multilateral approach by synthesising the first two questions in more gendered terms. It cannot be argued that hair itself is biologically or genetically gendered since it is present on every sentient being. That said, its colour, stylings, and perceptions in patriarchal systems and structures, for instance, of growth patterns such as beards, body hair and hair loss, have rendered its gendering as one of the most significant aspects of it. This study has demonstrated that concerns with gender are central to the work of my chosen artists, including

questions around abstract concepts of 'woman', women's roles and spaces, how they experience the world, and sexual and racial discrimination. Historical discourses have often placed women in a relationship with the body (and men with the mind). Although what Meskimmon terms as these 'masculine-normative values' cannot be ignored, this project has endeavoured to discover spaces of difference and transformation that do not rely on oppositional thinking. Indeed Griselda Pollock made a similar point when she argued that feminist readings must pay particular attention to "traces of a subjectivity formed in the feminine within and in conflict with a phallogocentric system."⁵ I have pursued an investigation into hair in this research that suggests because of its significance as a marker of identity, and its sensate and expressive characteristics, it can enable new interpretations of identity, and particularly of female identity.

To this end, I established that Rijkeboer chose to use hair for the ways it can express emotions, specifically in her quest about preconceptions of the dualities of identity. By examining her engagement and exploration of a number of themes, including the family, fairytales, and manipulation of identity through masking, veiling and cloning, we become aware of not only how diverse and nuanced the instability of identity can be, but also some of the ways we might experience it. In my exploration of Maher's work and synthesis of its previous theorisations, it became increasingly evident that central to her thinking and art practices is a challenge to preconceptions of women who are artists, and more abstract notions of 'woman'. I suggest that Maher's engagement with hair arises from some of its characteristics, including her delight in its materiality as expressive of the natural world, and its liminal position in the

⁵ Griselda Pollock, 'Inscriptions in the Feminine', in *Inside the Visible, An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art: in, of, and from the Feminine*, ed. by M. Catherine de Zegher, exh. cat. Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, (1996), pp. 67-87 (p. 74).

nature/culture dyad, both of which she explores in a number of ways. By juxtaposing some of the 'isms' of art against natural materials, myths and fairytales, Maher is able to subvert traditional representations of women, and her use of hair and its metaphors has been a potent means for examining the questions that concern her.

Soltau turned to actual hair as a means of aesthetic expression at a time of uncertainty in her life as an artist and a woman. We know her work immediately prior to this was concerned with depicting the visibility of women, their experiences and relationships to their environments through the wrapping, constricting and connecting of the female body. In her later work these two aspects, of hair and female embodiment, combine in her photo-stitchings and photo-etchings. In these works hair is replaced by metaphors of hair, as thread and line, and which like hair call attention to discrepancies between the inner and outer, skin and substrate, surface and sensations, and phases of the female body. Prendergast also responds to hair as a trace of the life cycle, as well as to its ability to symbolically map portraits of cities and images of embodied dispersal. Similarly, Gallagher uses hair to map dispersal and lives lost during the Middle Passage. Like Soltau, she also uses hair because of its association to the self, and through that to the black body. In summary, the women artists chosen for this study turn to hair in their practices for various reasons and uses. Although there does not seem to be a single or simple explanatory cause, and indeed the characteristics and histories of hair supports diversity, common to them all are the representations of experiences of the female body.

This substantive exploration of how five European women artists frame hair, calls attention to the female body in new ways that proffer alternative and more fluid notions of woman. American feminist journalist Shana Alexander's (1925-2005),

often repeated quotation about hair seems apt. She said of it: "Hair brings one's self-image into focus;...a tangle of mysterious prejudices."⁶ This research project has demonstrated that hair can be a substantive locus of preconception, discrimination and loss. It has also been shown as a vehicle of fascinating complexity in aesthetic practices, and specifically in those of my chosen artists. It can signal the embodied presence and absence alike, while sustaining its centrality as a metaphor for embodied experiences including memory, trauma and the life cycle. As a potent symbol of life, it is a particularly relevant theme for many women who are artists, partly because of its physical nature and metaphorical potential. To conclude, and drawing from Cixous, hair has been shown in this study as a compelling means for women artists to 'write' about the female body through a myriad of sensate experiences rather than through patriarchal language and values. As Cixous said:

"A feminine textual body is recognized by the fact that it is always endless, without ending: there's no closure, it doesn't stop, and it's this that very often makes the feminine text difficult to read."⁷

Although preconceptions of 'woman' may have consigned the female body to be a non-cerebral locus often associated with procreation, and sometimes as a metaphor for nation, this has also been shown to produce new interpretations of identity that may use these assumptions in alternative ways to produce less proscribed meanings. Woman's body may be the literal source of new life, but it can also be considered a site of new meanings. Unravelling what the body can mean through its parts, in this instance, through hair, offers such new meanings and ways to approach embodiment, and aesthetic practices. This project has suggested that drawing from some of the possibilities of the body rather than considering it a mute being, allows other more

⁶ Shana Alexander, quotation found on <<http://capelli.tumblr.com/>> (one of several thousand webpages to use this quotation.) [accessed 18 May 2011]

⁷ Hélène Cixous, 'Castration or Decapitation?' trans. by Annette Kuhn, *Signs*, 7, 1, (Autumn 1981), 41-55 (p. 53).

expressive, more haptic and diverse considerations of the feminine.

My approach in this project was to draw from a number of theories, but which were all underpinned by an interest in understanding difference as an active encounter rather than otherness. Considering hair as liminal matter of the body has enabled me to site my work within a theoretical framework that engages with issues of abjection and *écriture féminine*, while considering the serial as a concept of fluid repetitions and revisions. I premised that hair might be seen as a subject in process, in which women who are artists might frame hair through 'inscriptions in the feminine'.⁸ In fact, this strategy could be located within, and contribute to, discourses that underpinned the exhibition, *Inside the Visible*, (1996) curated by Catherine de Zegher.⁹ One of the reasons I chose this combination of artists was because their work had not been explored specifically in relation to either hair or the serial, and this research is an attempt at finding new meanings in the work of each of the artists. Although there was an adequate amount of previous literature on which to draw for Maher, Prendergast and Gallagher, this project has attempted the first theorisation of Chrystl Rijkeboer's work, and only the second of Annegret Soltau's work in English. The original material from the interviews I conducted with Rijkeboer and Soltau also contribute to this.

The practices of my chosen artists have been shown to enable the exploration of various tropes of hair, including its role in myth and fairytale, as a haptic trace of identity, and to question contemporary perceptions of the body even as it references memory, diasporic issues and race. This exploration into the diverse strategies of these artists has revealed hair to be a microcosm of the life cycle, a trace of both an

⁸ Pollock, in de Zegher, (1996), p. 74.

⁹ See note 5.

individual and a reminder of embodied actions. It can be a means of categorisation, and an expressive tool, and above all else, its rich diversity as an embodied material and its metaphorical potential has signalled its ability to resist and subvert systems and structures of power. Its centrality to numerous discourses has shown it to be rhizomatic rather than linear, an active matter in process, and richly invested with numerous and diverse differences of the feminine.

Appendix 1

Interview between Chrystl Rijkeboer (CR) and Heather Hanna (HH) on 15 April 2009 at Rijkeboer's studio in Harlem, The Netherlands

The following conversations were conducted wholly in English, and occasionally language difficulties were encountered by both parties.

H.H. When did you first start working with hair, Chrystl?

C.R. It was when I was still at art school. We organized an exhibition about fairytales. I was working on welded metal sculptures, but looking for a more psychological approach. All fairytales are about children who grow up - about innocence. A witch turns them into a bear or a bird by putting a spell on them. They grow fur or hair, and something happens from that. It's about initiation, about maturing, growing pubic hair. The idea of hair came to me from a visit to the WWII death camps in Poland twenty years ago. I saw blankets made from hair and it amazed me that anyone would make blankets from hair.

The first piece I made was a combination of fairytales and hair, entitled *Het Ordeel* (*The Verdict*), (1998). It is a throne covered in hair with two sound speakers in the wings of the back of the chair, which says in eighteen languages, "women to the right, men to the left". This separation can be found in churches, toilet-doors, and parting your hair. I thought of the chair as a throne, although it looks like a dog. When you're sitting in the chair it is really intimidating.

H.H. How did you make the throne?

C.R. I obtained some secondhand wigs from a wigmaker and sewed them together over the chair. I wanted to make it hair by hair but that would have taken too long.

H.H. Which piece of work did you make next?

C.R. That was *Onschuld I* (*Innocence I*), (1998). It's a colour photograph of a pregnant woman standing behind a felted carpet of hair. The carpet is society spreading out around the baby. The baby is not yet born but it's surrounded by life.

H.H. Do you mean the safety of the placenta?

C.R. Not the placenta, but a place where parents love their children, even the parents who abuse them, so the expectation of life is safety.

H.H. Tell me about *Onschuld II* (*Innocence II*), (1998).

C.R. That is all about my personal numbers, like all the numbers on the jackets in Auschwitz. I called it *Onschuld*, meaning innocence, because all my numbers - pincodes and phone numbers - are innocent. It looks shocking and condemning but it's just me. I had been working in a foster home with abused children and this had a great impact on me. As children we are born innocent but how we are formed is important for how we stand in life. These first sculptures are about innocence or guilt

and both are real. We are born 'not-knowing', then we become more 'knowing'. It's not really guilt, but it's knowing or understanding guilt, being aware.

H.H. Is this piece felted and stitched?

C.R. Yes, I felted the hair and stitched the numbers with the sewing machine. The pieces are glued together. All my work is laborious and slow.

H.H. Would you like to tell me a little about your next piece, *Strijd (Struggle)* Is it about the struggle for life?

C.R. It's about hierarchy in society, about survival and power. Some of the heads are further out of the ground than others, and they're the ones who are the most powerful.

H.H. It resonates with memories of Nazi war graves too, and the long hair of the wigs on the throne in *Het Ordeel*.

C.R. This hair is loose on the floor. I spread loose curls that are coming out of the ground all around the heads.

H.H. Almost like painting with hair. How did you make the heads?

C.R. They're made from *papier mâché* and *papier dur*.

H.H. If 'intention' is the key differential between craft-orientated work and an artwork, how do you see this in relation to your work?

C.R. I don't see myself as a craftsperson. I've never learned to felt properly. If it looks good enough I stick with it. Some of my old felted pieces have bleached in the sun because of lemon in the soap used for felting, but I'm not interested in the process of how it's done; it's only a means to an end. Spinning can be relaxing but irritating because it takes a long time to spin even a small ball of hair. I find I can think very well while I'm spinning, and I use the time for thinking about new works and texts. So the spinning is an important part of the work, and when people ask why do I not find someone to spin for me, I say, "No! I need it, I don't like it, I hate it", but I decide what sort of thread I need – a hairy thread or not – but the craft is just a process to develop the artwork.

H.H. So you're saying the type of thread spun is similar to choosing a particular brush, paint or other material?

C.R. Yes, and I enjoy handling the materials. If I need a better result then I have to learn more about technique.

H.H. Would you like to tell me about your next piece, *Het Verlangen*, and how that translates in English?

C.R. That is *Desire*, and it is about the decision to either have children or not. Many people become so desirous of having children it makes them sick, and then have IVF, while others do not want children and then they feel guilt. It's to do with both

women's own expectations and also about how women are expected to feel or want, in society. *Het Verlangen* is a vagina, as a symbol of the desire to be fertilized. The sperm are *papier mâché*, and quite large.

H.H. It almost looks like a kernel or a Fabergé egg, both earthy and of nature, but bejewelled with the sperm. Unlike *Onschuld*, *Het Verlangen* doesn't have any teeth!

C.R. It is a kind of guilty egg, about me personally not wanting to have children, but also about society not always caring properly for them, about what we do to them.

H.H. So it's quite personal, but with political overtones. Would you agree that some of these pieces are autobiographical, in that you bring your past to the work, which is then your future?

C.R. Well, yes, they come from me, from my thoughts. At art school I made works that didn't look like me but were self-portraits. If your work isn't about what is happening in your life, then you don't have a story. I don't believe in 'untitled'. For me there's an idea and a title, the work may change but there's always a title.

H.H. You seem to work in series, and there seems to be links to seriality in your work.

C.R. For me, numbers are important, specific numbers, like my angels – 666 – then it will be finished. I have made 298 so far. The title *Love is the Devil* gives the work an extra dimension.

H.H. The idea of repetition is very strong in your work, why is that?

C.R. For two reasons – I used to find it difficult when the work was finished. It was the fear of a black hole, but I have moved away from that. Multiples also have a purpose - some pieces need multiples.

H.H. Looking at *Home Sweet Home*, which is a multiple work, each frame evokes the notion of Victorian mourning pieces.

C.R. This work is still in progress: frames with crochet branches and knitted nest boxes, all made of human hair. It's about family and society, the roof is the father and the house is the mother. The houses are all about innocence, and individual space. I am asking why the concept of family is so strong. Even though we move away from our parents, we are still attached to them. It's a very emotional concept for me.

H.H. Why is the father the roof?

C.R. The father literally puts a roof over our heads, while the mother is the main part of the house. The house is a ubiquitous symbol and it relates to society's collective thinking. It's a measure of the individual in society. We all have our own handwriting with our own thoughts, and my thoughts are not so different from your thoughts. If we talk of human measures, we all come down to the same thing.

H.H. Your thoughts about society and the individual are also apparent in *Stolen Identity* (2005).

C.R. *Stolen Identity* is about ideals and the individual. A terrorist, for example, may also be a house-father, but he can't reveal himself. He wants to reveal his ideals, so it's a double-life. If he doesn't wear the balaclava he can be a 'normal' human being, but when he does wear it, he's scary. He can't show what he stands for, and although his ideals aren't my ideals, I find it a pity, that he cannot show himself. This is why I made the wedding installation. If you can't show your face in a wedding photograph, what's the meaning of the photo?

The *Avatar* (2006), followed on from this idea. I made the first one from a children's balaclava pattern in a 1976 magazine. In 2009 a child cannot wear a hat like this. I wanted to go back to find a 'human' level so I made others and friends wanted to pose in them. But when they wore them, something strange happens, they're not nice to wear, people got frightened, they didn't realise what it did to them. 'Avatar' is a computer game that gives people new identities - totally fake - my balaclavas do that too.

H.H. So you're saying in *Stolen Identity*, the balaclava can't be worn because you can't show your ideals, but the *Avatars* can be worn because they're more acceptable, more human or civilized and consumer-friendly?

C.R. They work through humour, the brown ones are more frightening, whereas the *Avatars* are more like little people. They have a zipper at the back of the head and the coloured hair came from the wigmaker who does the hair for musicals. They are very prickly to wear with all the little hairs coming out into the skin. This was my best exhibition in terms of reaction from the public, and also on blogs.

H.H. Tell me about the Matryoshkas, what are they about?

C.R. They come from the idea of the Russian doll. The *Baalbuska* with the tongue comes from *baal* – being really fed up with something, and the *Babooska* is the angry doll, the mannequin. The body is foam and then covered in hand-felted hair, and the faces are hand-painted. They have so little meaning, the rhythm of repetition is the important thing about them. There's a different rhythm when they're on the floor to when they're on the wall.

H.H. What do you associate with the rhythm?

C.R. Its like a factory production line, they're coming out more and more. There's no ending to it; it's overwhelming.

H.H. In 2000 you made the Venus figures. Can you explain the significance of them?

C.R. They are in the same series as the *Onschuld* pieces. *Venus I* is trying to keep her innocence by protecting the heads. They are her unborn babies or eggs. *Venus II* is desperate, she's screaming because she has lost her heads and her virginity and innocence.

H.H. This earlier artwork is called *Installatie Onschuld* (*Installation Innocence*) (1998), and it seems to address similar issues.

C.R. I call the female figure a 'Marie', she looks so proud with her baby, but is she? The male figure is more frightening and there is a question about whether the female is really looking after her child or not.

H.H. There is a real sense of danger in this piece. The father has an enormous hair penis that points directly to the child. This can never be a 'happy' family!

C.R. It is about all the forms of love within a relationship, some are innocent and some are not.

H.H. Moving on to *Burka* (2006), this also seems to address issues of fear?

C.R. This piece is about fear, and oppression and strength. Fear both literally and metaphorically, of who is under the burqa and also for the unknown. Ignorance of what we don't understand makes us afraid. Muslim women are oppressed in many parts of the world, and the burqa is a symbol of this but it is also one of strength for those who choose to wear it. It's about choices and how we can make them, about accepting, and the turning point as well, why we are so afraid of burqas.

H.H. (putting on *Burka* so that Chrystl can take a photograph of it.) What are these pieces coming from the front here?

C.R. I always use this technique in my work because I prefer the work not to look too neat; it's not necessary.

H.H. You seem to be challenging the process again. It is very heavy to wear (17 kilos), and so bristly and uncomfortable. I feel trapped by the closeness of the hair, especially to my face and head. Wearing this is quite an alarming experience, claustrophobic. Although I am hidden, I feel more forgotten and anxious to be released than protected.

C.R. Muslim women are not allowed to let their hair be seen and that's why I made it of hair. My challenge may offend people.

H.H. It seems to follow the *Stolen Identities* and *Avatar* series, as a veil to put a space between the female and the world.

C.R. In 2008 I made a site-specific piece called *R's Escape*, the 'R' stands for Rijkeboer and Rapunzel. I was asked to make a piece to go on-site near where I grew up, so this has to do with memory for me and nostalgia. I played in this ruined tower, and the ladder is my escape from childhood.

H.H. Do you think the fairytale offers a 'safe' method for a narrative?

C.R. It is useful for me because it clarifies both the story and my thoughts. I do nothing with the final outcome of the story; it is the narrative part that interests me, the process of the story.

H.H. So although you're not so much interested in the process in the physical making of the artworks, in the conceptual part of the work the process is the most important for you?

C.R. In the process of life, then I'm very interested.

H.H. How did the development of your work occur, the way you represent the body or part-body? A lot of your pieces focus on the head.

C.R. Yes, I think maybe the head is the most important for me because everything happens there. But in *Het Verlangen* I needed a vagina, so I didn't need to make arms or legs. It is all about identity, about who we are, where we are from and where we go, and what makes us who we are. Identity for me is about knowing who you are. Hair for me is so important – what you look like can be changed through your hair – dye it, cut it. We can change our looks so easily with our hair, and identify ourselves with how we want to look. Hair shows if you're healthy, it shows your age, if you're old or going grey.

H.H. Do you see yourself as engaging with femininity?

C.R. Yes, I challenge the role of women too. I want to say to women, "think on your feet, keep your eyes open, find out who you are and be strong".

Subsequent Email communications between Chrystl Rijkeboer and Heather Hanna

8 September 2010

H.H. When we talked about the teeth you used in the *Onschuld* series, you said some were human teeth and others were plastic. Would you like to tell me some more about them?

C.R. I first used teeth from my dentist, the ones they use in prostheses, but I needed so many that I began to make my own using moulding plastic.

H.H. When you were making the figures for *Perfect Strangers*, had you considered any connection between them and bodies that are found in archeological digs?

C.R. I didn't think of the meaning of, we call them 'veenlijken' (bog bodies) at all when I made *Perfect Strangers*. For me it was clear that if you use all kind of colors of hair together, it will be brown, so *Perfect Strangers* are brown. When I first exhibited them everybody asked me about, and told me they reminded them of the 'veenlijken'. For me they are made of the natural material of enormous numbers of unknown people.

H.H. I have been thinking about hair and DNA and your use of it in connection to, say, Marc Quinn's *Self*, that he made using his own blood, and I wonder if his work has had any bearing on yours?

C.R. One of my academic papers was written on self-portraits and Marc Quinn's *Self*

was one of the items in my paper. For me, he is the hero of self-portraits.

13 October 2010

H.H. You said earlier that Louise Bourgeois and Kiki Smith are big influences for their 'woman approach.' Could you explain that a little more?

C.R. First of all I find their 'woman approach' very interesting and touching for myself. They approach their subjects from an emotional point of view, that's the way I approach my work as well. The work can be hard and direct, but much more sensitive and 'deeper' than men (mostly) do. For example, I went to the exhibition *Double Sexus* with Louise Bourgeois and Hans Belmer. Both artists work about people, emotions and sex, and their work has similarities even though they never met. I find the work of Bourgeois so much more sensitive and therefore intense, and multi-interpretable than the work of Belmer. For me his is much more direct and 'flat', especially the sexual aspect that feels more like a 'peepshow' in male art. I know that is quite generalizing of me, but....I'm an emotional woman.

Of course the feminist viewpoint is important as well, but I think I find that 'normal' for an artist because they're more aware of their surroundings, society and opinions. For me feminism is normal. At home my mother had 'the trousers on', so woman power is quite normal for me. I was brought up with my 3 sisters aware we have to learn a profession because you must at all times be able to maintain yourself, so for me rights and duties are similar for men and women. But I personally think there is a difference between man and woman; in thinking, physicality, and approach to subjects/problems.

H.H. I was thinking about how your work is partly sculptural and partly installational, and your 1996 piece made when you were a student *Eat me, burn me*, reminded me of *Burka*, *Avatar* and *Stolen Identities*. They seem to have a participatory element to them, which potentially could open up new areas of communication in social spaces. *Burka*, *Avatar* and *Stolen Identities* are all pieces that the viewer physically can interact with by putting them on, wearing them. This is something you've done in the private space of your studio (you allowed me to try on *Burka*, and your family or friends model the *Avatars* and *Stolen Identities* balaclavas). Have you ever considered these as performances or exhibitions?

C.R. My work is about human relations in the first place, but I think I'm more the creator of the work than a performer. For me it's important that the work doesn't need me. There have been some performances with the works you mentioned; there has been a big performance in the opera in Leipzig with *Avatar* and *Burka*, and a ballet with *Avatar* and *Twins* in Osnabruck.

19 October 2010

H.H. Would you please tell me a bit more about *Home Sweet Home*? I remember you saying that you see the roof as the father and the house the mother.

C.R. Yes the roof is the father; he has to do the protection, the taking care of his family. The mother is the walls. She is 'the boss' of the house. The idea of the work is from nest boxes of birds. When the birds grow up and fly out the nest stays behind

empty. The hole has two meanings. It is referring to the vagina of the mother, she is giving birth/ life, but it stands for leaving (body and home) as well. The hole is an exit. The branches are a part of the family tree (family bond). I put them into frames because it refers to a family wall. Families do not always like and love each other, but the family bond is mostly too strong to really leave.

H.H. You said that you began using hair because it was the most emotional material you could use, did that change over time? For example, did you begin to see that it enabled other layers of meaning and interpretation precisely because it is a reminder of the physical body, and all the emotions that arouse?

C.R. Yes, off course the hair gets more and more a normal material for me, but I still want to use it with a meaning. If it isn't necessary as a material I use other materials. But I still work on emotional autobiographic items and the hair stands for my own emotions. Like the red riding-hood works; I'm the girl and the wolf stands for the unknown. In my family the unknown is frightful and therefore bad or not to be trusted. If it isn't own (which means family, people you know or inside crowd) they react negatively and scared. I had to fight my way out of that thinking.

Appendix 2

Interview between Annegret Soltau (AS) and Heather Hanna on 14 September 2009 at Soltau's studio in Darmstadt, Germany.

The questions were asked in English by Heather Hanna (HH) and, as necessary, Heidi Weitzel (HW) translated them into German for AS, and her responses into English for HH, who then wrote these down. Sometimes HW also entered the conversation and asked AS questions. A tape recording was also made of the session and transcribed and translated for HH by Ruth Spurgeon. Occasionally it was impossible to decipher the three-way conversation from the recording.

H.H. Hello Annegret, and thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. My first question concerns the human body. It seems that the female body in particular is the most important theme in your work, would you agree?

A.S. So ungefähr verstanden, dass der weibliche Körper mein Hauptanliegen ist. Ja, und ob ich damit einverstanden bin. Ja, bin ich. Es fing an so in den 70er Jahren. Ich hab' Radierungen gemacht und immer Frauen dargestellt, ohne dass ich mir's bewusst war. Weil ich eine Frau bin, bin ich von mir ausgegangen, und ich meinte aber den Menschen.

Yes, I roughly understand that the female body is my main concern. Yes, and if I am in agreement with that. Yes, I am, I do agree. It started in the '70s. I made etchings and always portrayed women, without always being conscious of that. Because I am a woman I always used myself as a starting point but I did mean a human being, not just a woman.

A.S. Ja, existentiell...und darauf kam dann die Bewusstwerdung, was die Rolle als Frau bedeutet für mich; das war eher eine Frage der Gesellschaft, die Infragestellung der 70er Jahre. Das kam dann dazu, dass ich sozusagen entdeckt wurde, ja, die Annegret Soltau stellt Frauen dar, und dann mit dieser Frage wurde mir das bewusst.

Yes, existentially, and after that came the awareness of it, what the role of women actually meant for me – that was more a question of social issues, the questions raised in the '70s. Then in addition to that I was more or less discovered as 'Annegret Soltau who portrays women', and with that I became more aware of myself as a woman.

H.H. Your work seems to reference directly the phases of life that have been suggested as mirroring the stages of your own life; not necessarily autobiographical, but – how it is. Would you agree?

A.S. Das kam natürlich durch dieses, was ich vorher gesagt hab', dass ich auf mich zurückgeworfen wurde und mich selbst in Frage gestellt hab', dann immer näher zu mir selber gekommen bin. Erst hab' ich andre dargestellt, mit andren Menschen gearbeitet... ja, und das hab' ich dann ganz bewusst eingesetzt.

It all has to do with what I said earlier, that I was thrown back onto myself and began to question myself, which meant I came closer to my own existence as a

person. Initially I portrayed others and did work with other people. Then, I made conscious use of all this awareness in my own work.

H.H. When you lived in Milan, your covered heads in both the *Umschlossene* and *Selbst* series are either covered in hair or wrapped in what might be seen as umbilical cords. Would you like to explain why you did this, and if it is to do with 'constraints' of femininity, and are these your first works with hair?

A.S. Ja, da bin ich von Haar ausgegangen, ganz bewusst, dass das Haar ein Teil von mir ist, aber doch auch losgelöst...also so zwischen. Ich kann es abschneiden, ohne mir weh zu tun. Es wurde dann auch ein Symbol für mich, dass ich das Haar – oder der Faden auch – eingefangen sein in mich selbst darstellen kann...und Schutz...also beides.

My starting point was hair – very consciously. When I started this work I was aware of hair as a part of myself, me, yet removed, separate. I can cut it without hurting myself. It then became a symbol for me, that hair or a thread, that I can be caught in it, and that I can use it for self-portrayal, and as a protection...both.

H.H. Do you remember why you began to think about hair in that way?

A.S. Das war in Italien, als ich da in Mailand war; ich hatte ein Stipendium, und war mit meinem Mann in einem ganz kleinen Zimmer, und ich konnte die Sprache nicht, und dadurch war ich so ganz immer isoliert. Und gleichzeitig...also die Toilette war ausserhalb, und da lagen die Stapel italienische Zeitungen, und dann hab' ich in den Zeitungen geblättert und viele Frauenporträts gesehen, die in Tüchern geschlossen waren und auf der Strasse; also davon bin ich ausgegangen; also von Tüchern...die Frauen im Süden getragen haben, also in Italien getragen haben.

At that time I lived in Italy, in Milan, on a stipend, in a very small room with my husband. I did not speak the language and because of that felt very isolated. In addition, we had an outside toilet and in there lay piles of Italian newspapers and I leafed through them and saw many portrait photographs of women who were wrapped or enclosed in scarves, ...and on the streets... Well, that is where I started from...from these wrappings, which women wore in the South, in Italy.

(We look at etchings.)

A.S. ...aus der Zeit...Italien...und daraus, aus diesen Umwicklungen ist dann die Zeichnung entstanden, die hier drin ist...das ist auch alles in der Zeit...und die Augen geschlossen, so in mich gekehrt.

These are from that time in Italy, and out of this, these wrappings, emerged the drawings, which are somewhere in here – the eyes are closed, as if looking inwards. (AS commenting on her work.)

H.W. to A.S. headscarves and hair...connection?

A.S. to H.W. Ja, das hatte dann natürlich auch mit dem Zeichnen zu tun. Die Linie ist ja schon für mich, war ein Haar, und die Haare spürt man, die wehen einem ins

Gesicht, und dann ist es plötzlich wie eine Zeichnung, die man auf dem Gesicht hat. Ja, und Haar ist ja auch als Schutz, so wie Tuch; langes Haar.

That of course had to do with drawing. The line for me is like a hair... I can feel the hair...the wind blows hair into the face and then it is suddenly like a drawing that you have on your face, and hair is also like a protection, long hair.

H.H. So, going from that, you were interested in protection. Did that have to do with femininity, that 'enclosing' as well, or was that just to do with the room?

A.S. Nein, das war ja natürlich nicht nur der Raum, das war auch die Rolle, in der ich mich befunden hab'. Ich war ja selbst...

...und auch die Frau ...sehr komplex jetzt ein bisschen...ich hab'mich damals auch beschäftigt mit Gudrun Ensslin und der RAF.

No, of course it wasn't only the room, it also was the role in which I found myself...and also woman...it gets a bit complicated now. I was also interested in Gudrun Ensslin, and the RAF [Red Army Faction].

(H.W. explains about Gudrun Ensslin, Ulrike Meinhof, RAF/Baader-Meinhof.)

A.S. Da hab' ich dann diese Radierungen gemacht zu der Zeit auch und darüber nachgedacht, wie sie in ihrer Rolle sich gefangen...in ihrer eigenen Rolle sich gefangen sah...Ulrike Meinhof. Nachher kann ich noch alles zeigen.

That's when I made these etchings and thought about it because I saw her [Meinhof] as being caught in her role. I can show you all this later.

H.W. She wasn't the only artist who occupied herself with members of this group. Gerhard Richter was also working with these people in mind.

A.S. Ja, und ich komm da jetzt auch darauf, weil gerade wieder eine Dissertation geschrieben wird und ich angeschrieben wurde...Kunst in Verbindung mit Terrorismus.

Yes, and I'm also thinking of this now because someone is writing a dissertation on the connection between art and terrorism and wrote to me.

Ich hab' die Arbeit gemacht, als sie [Meinhof] im Gefängnis war...ich hab' da alle Radierungen, die damit zu tun haben, schon herausgesucht...aber, im Verlauf des Interviews...wir können ja später...jetzt nicht so richtig.

I did this work when she [Meinhof] was in prison. I've already looked out all the etchings that have to do with that, but perhaps we can talk about it in the course of the interview, this isn't quite the right point.

H.H. So that was 1974?

H.W. Between 73/74.

H.H. It seems the human figure is both isolated from other human beings when it is wrapped, yet also kept safe within that wrapping. What is this about? Is it to do with safety or imprisonment?

A.S. (to H.W.) Ich hab' verstanden. Aber es gehen auch Verbindungsfäden dazwischen 'raus...das ist mir wichtig...die gehen ja immer wo hin.

I understood. But there are also connecting threads going outwards from in between...that is important to me...they always go somewhere.

H.H. I was going to say there seems to be a contrast between imprisonment and also safety; wrapped in a cocoon.

A.S. Ja, ja, ambivalent...die Ambivalenz...ist in meiner Arbeit immer drin ...das hat auch oft die zwei Seiten.

This ambivalence is always part of my work, the dual role. It also often has two sides.

H.H. I like the back.

(Pause)

H.H. In *Permanente Demonstration* (1975-6), for example, there might be references to relationships between people, but also to the isolation of each human. What did you have in mind in this piece?

A.S. Ich hab' ja in meiner Grafik psychische Zustände dargestellt, oder existentielle.

I have always shown in my drawings psychological conditions or existential ones.

H.H. Before, it had been two-dimensional, and now it is three-dimensional. How did this come about?

A.S. [Speaking to H.W.] Ach ja, sie [referring to H.H.] hat da eben etwas eingebracht, was natürlich ganz wesentlich ist.

Oh, yes, she has just said something that is very essential.

A.S. Ich wollte dreidimensional werden, ich hab' nämlich nach der Grafik – oder während ich die Grafik gemacht hab' – versucht Skulptur zu machen. Aber die Form gefiel mir nicht...in der Art...so wollte ich gar nicht dreidimensional werden, wusste aber nicht wie. Und ich wäre in Konkurrenz zu meinem Mann gekommen...und durch die Radierungen, die 'etchings', wo ich ja schon eingraviert hab' auf die Kupferplatte...und da hab' ich verbunden, das Dreidimensionale wollte ich auch körperlich spüren.

I wanted to do something 3-dimensional, so while I was drawing I tried sculpture but it wasn't the right way for me. That was not how I wanted to be 3-dimensional, but I wasn't quite sure how. And besides I would have come into competition with my husband [the artist Baldur Greiner, b. 1946-]. I wanted to find another way, and

through etching where I had already engraved into the copperplate...so I just combined it; I wanted to feel the 3-dimensionality in a physical sense.

H.H. Were you interested in the spontaneity of the performance?

A.S. Ja, auch das Ungewisse: ich wollte einfach einen Entwicklungsschritt. Und ich wollte das Körperliche; ich wollte, dass man das spürt...die Zeichnung.

Yes, also the unknown, and I wanted a developmental step, and the physical side of it. I wanted that one feels... the drawing.

H.H. Are you talking about etching here or the performance?

A.S. Performance.

H.H. That it should be felt by the body?

A.S. Yes. Das, was ich dargestellt hatte, also im Bild, wollte ich körperlich ...lebendig machen.

Yes. What I had portrayed visually I wanted to bring physically...to life.

H.H. It seems to me that the wrapping in the performance is more spontaneous, and is a more immediate process, but it is quite laborious, time-consuming. Traditional sculpture might link more to the male domain and this more to the feminine perhaps?

A.S. Hab's verstanden. Es war ja auch zeitgleich. Die 70er Jahre, die ja an mir nicht vorübergegangen sind, das hängt mit Bewusstsein zusammen. Ich hab' damals auch teilgenommen.

I've understood. It was of its period. The '70s didn't bypass me. That goes together with the awareness and I participated in it.

H.W. (repeats H.H.'s question re time intensity of performance.)

A.S. Das dauert ja immer 'ne Stunde...manchmal noch länger, wenn ich den Raum mit einbezogen hab'. Hab' ich ja auch manchmal gemacht. Ich wollte einfach 'raus aus der traditionellen Grafik. Ich wollte kein Meister der Grafik werden.

These performances take an hour, or sometimes longer when I have included the room, which I've also done sometimes. I just wanted to get away from traditional graphic arts. I didn't want to become a 'master' etcher.

(H.H. and A.S. briefly discuss art schools in England and Germany.)

H.H. Was it like that in Germany?

A.S. Bei uns...ich hab' ja auch von '67 bis '72 studiert, genau in den 60er Jahren, an der Hamburger Akademie, und während ich dort war, hat sich alles aufgelöst; also, es wurde eigentlich gar nicht mehr gemalt. Weil mein Leben besonders hart

[war], weil ich nicht in einem bürgerlichen Hause aufgewachsen bin und da auch irgendwie keine Möglichkeit hatte, zu studieren.

I studied between 1967 and 1972 at the Academy in Hamburg and during this time everything was in dissolution and no-one painted any longer. My life was hard at the time. I didn't grow up in a middle class household, in fact I didn't really have any opportunity to study.

H.W. ...and her family was...

A.S. ...ich hatte gar keine Familie.

...I had no family.

(H.W. points out that at the moment A.S. arrived at the Academy, the students from wealthy families were demonstrating. She was alone in the studio because she wanted to work.)

A.S. Ich hab' mich sogar eingeschlossen.

I even locked myself in.

A.S. Weil das ja mein Traum war, da hinzukommen. Und kaum war ich da, war's schon nicht mehr akut.

It was my dream to get to art school and the moment I arrived, it didn't really matter any more, it was irrelevant.

H.H. What about *Selbst* (1975), where there seem to be several ideas in the one series? Some of the photographs are of the face constricted with black thread and sometimes the threads are more decorative. There seems to be both performance and stitching in *Selbst*. Would you tell me how you made this series and how many pieces there are in it?

A.S. Das ist ja die *Selbst* Performance. Das war meine erste Performance...und das ist wieder das erste 'mal wo ich dann in dieses Performance-Foto...eine Überarbeitung.

Yes, that is the Selbst performance. It was my first performance. This was also the first time where I then worked into this performance photo...a "working-over".

H.W. She continued to work with performance photographs.

H.H. Why did you decide to do that?...the two sides?

A.S. Das war für mich...die Performance konnte ich ja nur öffentlich machen, oder ich hab' sie auswärts gemacht...und ich konnte nicht immer zur Performance fahren...und so war ich ja gewöhnt, doch immer wieder im Atelier zu arbeiten, und da kam ich auf die Idee, direkt in das Foto zu arbeiten.

That was for my own sake. I could only do the 'performance' in public or by going somewhere. It wasn't always possible to travel to do performances, and I was used to working in my studio, and that gave me the idea to work directly into the photograph.

(Looking at one of the photographs.)

Das ist...der eine Faden, das ist der fotografierte Faden...den hab' ich als Vorlage genommen...den weiter auszuführen wie 'ne Maske.

This is one of the threads. That is the photographed thread, and I used that as a model to develop it like a mask.

(Looking at the photograph A.S. distinguishes for H.H. the threads in the photograph, and the threads over the photograph – "...Aber reale...über das Foto" – real ones...over the photo.)

Das war gegenüber den Performances ästhetisch, weil es so eine Art Maske...ich hab' da auch gedacht an die Bemalungen von der Leni Riefenstahl, die hatte damals diese schönen Fotos gemacht von den Masai.

Compared to the performances it was more aesthetic because it is a type of mask. I was also thinking of the beautiful photographs that Leni Riefestahl took of the Masai and their painted body decoration.

A.S. Ich hatte damals jedenfalls ein Foto von...in meinem Atelier. [Sie war] umstritten. She was a very good photographer..und Filme... but not her political...

At the time I had one of her photographs in my studio, [she was] controversial. She was a very good photographer and filmmaker, but her politics [were questionable].

H.H. How important to you is 'haptisch' in relation to the threads?

A.S. Ja, wesentlich, also ganz wesentlich.

Yes, essential, crucial.

H.H. Why is that?

A.S. Ja, das hat verschiedene Möglichkeiten, weil ich damit unter die Haut gehen kann, sozusagen, ich kann das anfassen... über und unter...beides...und in das Material...und es verbindet aussen und innen.

There are a number of possibilities, because I can go under the skin with it, so to speak. I can touch it...above and below, both, and into the material, and it connects outside and inside.

H.H. What's this connecting to do with? It's important, isn't it? As well as being about imprisonment, the connecting seems very important?

A.S. Ja, der Austausch. Später dann. Und dann hat das auch noch mit der Schwangerschaft zu tun...und ich hatte damals...hab' ich mich ganz stark damit auseinandergesetzt...selber schwanger zu werden oder ein Kind zu bekommen, oder keins, wie auch immer. Als ich Anfang 30 war; als ich 30 wurde...und empfand ich als Eingriff...Körpereingriff.

Yes, the exchange. Later then. It also had to do with the pregnancy. At the time I was strongly debating to become pregnant, to have a child, or none, whichever. When I had just turned thirty...I experienced it as an intervention into my body.

H.H. How did, or do you, view the marks left after the wrapped threads on the face are removed?

A.S. Das war für mich sehr wichtig, weil das die Zeit...also die Zeiterfahrung darstellt. Wie die Falten auf der Haut, was sich auch einträgt...das Erlebnis einträgt...Leben auf der Haut zu sehen.

They were very important for me because they show the experiences of time, like wrinkles that also engrave...engrave experience...you can see life on your skin.

H.H. I understand you collected your hair every day in 1977, could you explain what that meant for you?

A.S. In '77, bevor ich schwanger wurde hatte ich 'ne Krise....[ich] 'collected' die ausgefallenen Haare; und hab' sie wie ein Tagebuch festgehalten jeden Tag. Und daneben hab' ich auch andere Tagebücher, also so mit lavierte [und] mit Wort...also so Aufzeichnungen gemacht,...zur gleichen Zeit, wo ich die Haare gesammelt [hab']. Ich wollte dann einfach das festhalten, das Haar, weil das ein Teil von meinem Körper war, was ich verloren hab'. Ich nenn das *Meine Verlorenen Haare*.

In 1977 before I became pregnant, I had a crisis and during this time I collected the 'fallen-out' hair each day. I treated this as a diary, and parallel to this I also kept other diaries of wash-drawings with words. In other words, I noted down things at the same time as I collected hair. I simply wanted to fix these hairs because they were a part of my body that I'd lost. I called it 'My Lost Hair'.

H.W. Es war auch so 'ne Angst...also Angstarbeit.

It was a kind of angst therapy.

H.H. So hair was therapeutic?

A.S. Ja. für mich war's dann auch ein Teil von mir und wie so ein Abdruck. Aber auch eine Ratlosigkeit...die Arbeit ist so 'ne Neben-[Arbeit]...ich hab' sie auch nie gezeigt. Ich hab's heute auch wieder zum erstenmal gesehen.

Yes, it was a part of me, (and also like a kind of 'print'). I was at a loss – it was something I did on the side. I have never shown it publicly and today I saw it for the first time after a long time.

H.W. It was a very special work. It was a time of helplessness.

A.S. Ja, mit allem, in der Kunst, im Leben.

Yes with everything; art and life.

H.H. On a personal level rather than as an artist: the uncertainty linked to your background with your mother and unknown father, and fear of losing your identity as an artist if you had a baby?

A.S. Das war wirklich die Frage...ob ich ein Kind krieg...und dann Angst davor, wenn ich das eingehe, ob ich nicht dann als Künstlerin meine Identität verliere.

That really was the question. Should I have a child, and then the fear if I agreed to that if then I lose my identity as an artist.

A.S. Ja, weil ich ja auch wusste über Geschichten von Künstlerinnen in der Geschichte, dass sie meistens, wenn sie dann...mit 'nem Mann leben, das ging noch, ich war ja mit 'nem Partner zusammen, war auch verheiratet ganz normal, aber wir haben ja'n Künstlerleben gelebt und hatten auch wenig Geld, und das war alles sehr kompliziert, und da hatt' ich natürlich dann schon Angst.

Yes, because I also knew about stories of female artists throughout history that living with a man was just about possible... I had a partner and was properly married – but we had lived the life of artists and had little money and it was all very complicated, so naturally I was afraid.

(H.W. refers back to question about A.S.'s mother.)

A.S. Ach so, wegen meiner Mutter. Ja, das kommt noch dazu, dass ich vielleicht dachte, weil meine Mutter mich weggegeben hatte, und ich Angst hatte, weil in der Psychologie heisst es ja immer so: wer keine Liebe weitergeben [kann], und da hab' ich auch noch dran gezweifelt, ob ich überhaupt 'ne Mutter sein kann.

Oh yes, because of my mother. That came in addition, that I perhaps thought because my mother had given me away, and I was afraid because in psychology they always say those [who don't receive love], can't give love, so I doubted if I could be a proper mother.

(Tea/Coffee break followed by a short personal discussion of AS's upbringing.)

H.H. When you were in Hamburg, you worked with a surgeon?

A.S. He was an emergency doctor [Unfallarzt], a surgeon...in the harbour. Yes, it was in the harbour. I worked in the operating room and assisted in operations; I worked there for nine months. The surgeon treated accidents at work from the harbour; there were serious cases such as amputations, once I even had to assist in a serious head injury.

H.H. Is this where the stitching comes from, or is that something you did at home with your grandmother?

A.S. *I had to do that, I didn't like it but I had to do it. My grandmother was a farmer's wife. I had an old-fashioned kind of life. When I was young I had to sew the intestines of animals for sausage-making. Under the skin is the fat for using as lard, and under this is another layer of membrane that I had to sew up.*

H.H. Was it an inner skin... one that relates to your work, and maybe to do with the abject?

A.S. *Maybe. I haven't thought about all this; I've forgotten all this.*

H.H. Because its deep inside? I'm sorry I brought it up.

(Pause)

H.H. Turning to Gernot Böhme...

A.S. *He is a Philosoph.*

H.H. He suggests deconstructing or defacing identity as a sort of brutality. Do you see that in your work?

A.S. Ich selbst nicht...und ich sehe nur vielleicht eine Expression für mich, einen Ausdruck...aber keine Brutalität, das wird von Aussen so gesehen, aber ich selber sehe das nicht...Ich will einfach nur ...radikal... [A.S. searches for the right word], 'ne, ich find's im Moment nicht.

I don't see it myself – I only see it as a way of expression that suits me – but not brutality. That's a view from the outside but I myself don't see that. I just want to ...radical...I can't find the right word at the moment.

A. S. Ich sehe das einfach nicht, das wird immer als aggressiv und total angesehen, und viele sagen auch ich wäre aggressiv, was ich nicht so bin. Auf jeden Fall hab' ich das deshalb nicht gemacht; ich mache es, weil ich es so direct machen wollte, und wie es aufgenommen wird, das kann ich nicht so unbedingt meinen.

I really don't see it. It is always seen as aggressive and 'in your face', and many say that I am aggressive – which I am not. In any case I haven't done it because of that. I do it because I want to make it in a very direct way. How people interpret it isn't necessarily what I mean.

H.H. Reading Böhme, I feel he sees it from a different viewpoint to me.

A.S. Das muss ich dazu sagen zu den beiden Texten: Farideh Akashe-Böhme ist auch in dem Katalog. Das ist ein Paar und ich hatte die beide gebeten, weil sie ein Paar sind, beide philosophisch...sie ist ja nicht nur philosophisch, sie ist ja mehr soziologisch, aber hat auch viel zum Thema Frau geschrieben...deshalb wollte ich, dass sie als Paar einen gemeinsamen Text machen...das haben sie aber nicht...sie haben ihn ja getrennt gemacht...und deshalb haben sie beide einen kürzeren Text als die anderen...denn das war als ein Text gedacht. ...weil das einer sein sollte...und weil ich aus weiblicher und männlicher Sicht das haben wollte. Sie haben das dann nicht gekonnt.

I have to add something with regard to the two texts. Farideh Akashe-Böhme is also in the catalogue. They are a couple, and I had asked both because they are a couple and because they are both philosophically inclined...She is not only philosophical, she also looks at it sociologically, and has also written a great deal on the topic 'Woman'. That is why I had wanted them to write something together...but they didn't, they wrote separately. That's why their contributions are shorter than those of the others...because my idea had been that they just wrote one. They were not able to do it.

H.H. When you take your photographs and tear them up, you then re-form them, or stitch them together. It's never the original configuration, it's an alternative, so are you critiquing what we as humans do to ourselves...or the re-iteration of traumas...would you say?

A.S. Hab ich jetzt nicht so direkt gesehen, nein. Das ist für mich jetzt neu. Also, das kann ja drin sein, aber das hab' ich jetzt...eher nicht.

I haven't really seen it exactly like that. No, that's a new viewpoint to me. It could be part of it, but I don't see it at the moment, to be honest.

H.H. So if it's not that primarily...what is the prime reason for tearing them up and stitching them together?

A.S. Ich möchte schon, dass das sichtbar bleibt, die Verletzbarkeit...vielleicht ist es dann ja doch das...

I do want it to remain visible, the vulnerability...so perhaps it is after all...

H.H. Vulnerability to what?

A.S. ...ja, dass das, was ich zusammenfüge – oder was zusammen sein soll... dass das vielleicht doch nicht ganz geht...

Well, that what I gather together or what is supposed to be together...that perhaps it doesn't quite work like that...

H.W. ...discrepancy, Annegret is very interested in the discrepancy.

A.S. Ich glaub jetzt...ich arbeite ja mit mir und mit meiner Familie, mit ganz engen Typen. Aber deshalb denk' ich nicht...glaub' ich trotzdem nicht an die heile Welt, oder so...

I think... I work with photographs of myself and my family; types who are close to me. But that doesn't mean I believe in an ideal world.

H.H. So, if you're interested in the discrepancy between the edges and boundaries and the torn parts... that's sort of a funny thing, isn't it, to tear the picture apart to get to that. I'm not sure what I'm asking!

A.S. Ja, ich zerreiss' ja nicht alles, sondern ich...ich zerreiss' ja nicht das Gesamte... immer nur die Person, und die Umrisse bleiben stehen meistens. Aber Sie möchten wissen, warum ich das mache? Ich kann's vielleicht sagen...da muss ich von dem Anfang wieder ausgehen...also, als ich das erste 'mal ein Foto ausgerissen hab' und nicht nur übernäht hab', das war ja in der Schwangerschaft. Und deshalb vermute ich 'mal, das ist dieser Eingriff...dass es mit dem Eingriff zu tun hat. Es war für mich ein Eingriff in meinen Körper...also einen Teil...und das hab' ich einfach dann fortgesetzt. Also, diese Eingriffe – also, für mich ist das schon auch ein Eingriff auf die Generationsfolgen...ich weiss jetzt nicht, ob das zu tun hat mit meinen Erlebnissen mit meiner Mutter, das weiss ich nicht – mach' ja keine Analyse...ich wollte mich nicht selbst psychologisch...

Yes, well I don't tear the entire piece; always only the person, and the outlines usually remain. To go back to your question why I'm doing it... I have to return to the beginnings again...in other words when I first tore something out of a photograph and didn't just overstitch it. That was during my pregnancy and that is why I suspect that it is this intervention [invasion] ...it has to do with intrusion. It was an intrusion into my body, a part of it, and I just continued from there. Also these intrusions, well for me, are also intrusions into the ancestral line. I'm not sure at the moment if that has something to do with my experiences with my mother. I haven't been analyzed psychologically. I didn't want to look at myself in those terms.

(Looking at another work.)

A.S. Also die Sichel, die hab' ich öfters genommen also Symbol; das ist ja diese Sichel – Sense oder Sichel – weil meine Grossmutter... für mich auch ein Symbol, das hab' ich auch in der Schwangerschaft hier genommen...es ist für mich ein Symbol der Kindheit.

I have often chosen a sickle as a symbol, and this sickle or scythe has to do with my grandmother. I've also used it as a symbol during my pregnancy. It is a symbol of my childhood.

H.H. I know you have done some work on the *NY Faces*... *After Chernobyl* – did you do work after that?

A.S. Nach Chernobyl hab ich 'ne andere Arbeit gemacht; aber diese *New York Faces* haben mit dem 11ten September zu tun.

After Chernobyl I did something else, but these NY Faces have to do with September 11.

A.S. ... da hab' ich mit meiner Tochter im Grass die Aufnahmen gemacht und da war das...das war genau, als das passierte. Und wir sind abends nach Hause gekommen, und ich hab' gehört...und dann hab' ich die also so grünlich-bläulich belichtet, hab da Ausschnitte herausgenommen von den Fotos... hab' diese Arbeit dann herausgemacht, die dreiteilig ist; sind auf Leuchtkästen noch...

I took some photographs of myself and my daughter in the grass, and that was exactly when it happened. Then when we returned home we heard the news on the radio about Chernobyl. The photographs had been taken with another background

reference and then I exposed them with a greenish, blueish filter. [AS is referring here to 2 Tage Danach – Tschernobyl (1986-90) (2 Days after Chernobyl)]. I took out a detail from the photographs, then out of that I made this work, which is in three parts. It's still on lightboxes. (A.S. looks for the work.)

A.S. Ja, da ist es...das sind Leuchtkästen...

H.W. Diese Farbe hat sie gewählt, weil sie damit assoziiert so Reaktoren...dieses leuchten, Strahlen...

(Annegret looks for the lightboxes and Heidi explains that Annegret chose the colour because she associates it with reactors...the glowing rays.)

(We look at some work, and then at a poster.)

A.S. Das wird jetzt auch immer wieder überall angefragt; also, die Galerie Becker hat das auch, die Zeitungen bilden das ab; also, das ist jetzt so alt, und im Moment ist es richtig...jetzt in Frankfurt war's auch wieder in der Zeitung abgebildet – in der *Franfurter Rundschau*... überall, im Moment ist das so... überall gesehen...und ich hab' das schon so lange...und ich hab' es schon so lange. ...in Frankfurt ist es deshalb, weil ich die ältere Künstlerin bin, und sozusagen die Anfänge dieser Art...[tape recording difficult to understand, but something to do with A.S. being the artist who was there at the beginning, and is therefore now of interest to the younger generation of artists.] Es gibt deshalb jetzt sehr viel, weil auch vieles geschichtlich aufgearbeitet wird.

That is in demand at the moment from all over the place. The Anita Beckers Gallery in Frankfurt also has it, and the newspapers are printing it. Well, it is now so old but at the moment it seems just right...recently it was reprinted in a paper in Frankfurt, in the Frankfurter Rundschau...it's absolutely everywhere and I produced it such a long time ago. In Frankfurt it is because I'm the older artist, the one who was there at the start so to speak. There is so much at the moment because much needs to be put into historical perspective.

H.H. Were you influenced by people like Valie Export?

A.S. Yes. Das war die Zeit. Ulrike Rosenbach, die kenn' ich auch persönlich und ich seh' das schon in diesem Kontext.

Yes, that was that period. Ulrike Rosenbach I know personally and I do see her in that context.

Both the German artist Ulrike Rosenbach (1943-) and Austrian Valie Export (1940-) have been contextual references for my performances.

(Continuing to speak about the poster that was used for the *WACK!* Exhibition.)

A.S. Dieses Motiv haben sie ja für die ganze Ausstellung dann in Vancouver genommen, auch auf dem Plakat die grossen Fotos; und das war auch das Banner...weil sie das auch so als Symbol gesehen haben, die Fäden...der Aufbruch.

They chose this motive [from the poster] for the exhibition in Vancouver, the large photographs on their poster, and it was also turned into a banner, because they viewed it as a symbol...the threads, the break-out.

H.H. Tell me about when you scratched the negative in *Im Gleichgewicht*, please. Is it important to have all those prints...a serial way of working?

A.S. Das hat zeitgleich – ungefähr – als diese Übernähung, die...dekorativen *Selbst pieces* – '75/'76 – hab' ich hier mit angefangen, das ich ins Negativ geritzt hab'. '76...bischen später. Und ich hab' dann die ganzen Arbeiten...also davon gibt's ganz grosse Tableaus...mit tausenden von Fotos...das immer...also da sieht man das 'mal...das hab' ich 'mal für eine Edition gemacht. Also *Mutter und Kind* und dann immer überkratzt mit der Nadel, wieder mit der Nadel, nicht ins (?) Kind, sondern "in the negative".

That happened at the same time, more or less. This was about the same time as the more decorative Selbst pieces. '75/'76 I started here with this which I scratched into the negative. '76...a little later. I made huge tableaux of these negatives, with thousands of photos, and smaller ones for an edition. Well, there's Mutter und Kind...always scratched over with a needle, and again with a needle, not into the [?] child but into the negative.

H.H. Why did you do that?

A.S. Ja, das war nochmal wieder...also bei mir ist ganz wichtig die Radierung, weil da noch [neue Ideen]...Und hier kann ich den Prozess auch darstellen...

That was again...well, for me etching is very important. A lot of new ideas came to me from etching. And here I can show the process.

H.W. Like in a performance.

A.S. Die Verwandlung.

The transformation.

H.H. So is it like a frame in the performance, in the video?

A.S. Ja. Ich hab' ja auch damals Video-performance gemacht in der Schwangerschaft... Hier ist der Weg grade anders herum bei dieser Art. Bei der Fotovernähung da reiss' ich erst aus... Erst ist ein Loch. Und dann muss ich...eine Umwicklung ist, also – das Loch entsteht hier – das sind Löcher.

Yes, and at the time I also used video-performance during the pregnancy...with that, the way [process] is exactly the opposite. With the photostitchings I start with tearing out, first there is a hole, and then I fill it in. A wrapping in...well the hole is made, these are the holes.

H.H. Right through?

A.S. Das ist jetzt natürlich ein ganz kleines Format.

Of course this is a much smaller format.

H.H. Are you saying, you start with the human form as a 'perfect' symbol – mother and child – and you end with a state of abjection?

A.S. Also für mich ist das Schwarz nicht unbedingt ein Loch. Das ist zwar materiell hier ein Loch, ein Riss.

Well for me the black is not necessarily a hole. Materially, it is a hole, a tear.

(We move around the studio looking at various pieces of work including *Ich Überstochen* and *Generativ*.)

A.S. Ich hab' gleichzeitig auch das mit dem Mundschutz gemacht, weil da war gerade in Asien gewesen diese Grippe... Vogelgrippe war in Asien, und so hat die Idee also zusammen zum Schutze der Unikate, und die Operation, und weil die Krankheit...

At the same time as [Ich Überstochen] I also made one with mouth protection. It was at the time of 'bird flu' in Asia, which gave me the idea of how to protect [present] the originals, also to do with the operation, the illness.

(The following paragraph is constructed from fragments of conversation and notes made by H.H. away from the tape recorder.)

The *NY Faces* I made came from some photographs taken in a photo machine in New York. I was at an exhibition there in 1999 and went out and saw newspaper articles saying "It's war in Europe", when they were talking about the Kosovo conflict. I came across these photographs later in my studio after '9/11'. In the meantime I collected material from the dentist (from when I had extensive dental surgery), and combined the two. On the reverse faces of the artworks are newspaper articles from Kosovo and the New York attack. On the radio the war in Kosovo was also called 'operation' so there was some double meaning between the dental images and the Kosovo conflict. I wanted to show that neither America nor human society generally is invulnerable; reality is other. Another reason why I showed the *NY* work as a performance, is that the works shown were the originals. The audience wore gloves and masks. The gloves were to handle the photos without leaving sweat, and also as a reference to the NY attack; and further, it was about protection. We were also seeing photographs about bird flu in Asia at that time and people wore surgical masks, and it also referred to my dental operation.

H.H. In connection with what you're saying about protection, when I visited the Frankfurter Museum für Angewandte Kunst [Museum of Applied Arts] yesterday, visitors to the current exhibition were asked to wear protective covers over their shoes to keep the gallery floor clean. It had been painted white, possibly for the specific exhibition. It's interesting how many meanings there can be to one issue.

(We look at more of A.S.'s work, and there is mention of the large-size *Generativ* which had been taken down [censored] when first exhibited, and which is at the moment at a museum.)

H.H. I was going to ask you about the censorship of *Generativ*, how did you feel?

A.S. Am Anfang hat's mich sehr erschreckt. Weil ich, ich war eigentlich ein bisschen schockiert.

In the beginning I was horrified, because I was actually a bit shocked.

H.H. Were people rude to you on the streets?

A.S. Nein, Journalisten...ich hatte Anrufe...dazu Stellung nehmen.

No, there were journalists...I learned about it over the telephone, and was asked to comment.

H.W. For some time she didn't know about the censorship, then she got telephone calls.

H.H. I wanted to ask you about how you came to the spiderwebs. What made you think about collecting them?

A.S. Ach so, ja, weil mich die Spinnennetze schon immer...weil es ja auch 'ne haptische Spur ist...was die Spinne hinterlassen hat, wie 'ne Zeichnung.

Well, I've always been [interested] in spiderwebs...it is a kind of haptic trace...what the spider leaves behind, like a drawing.

H.H. Were you working with them at the same time you were keeping the hair diaries?

A.S. Ja, '77. Ach ja, die Haare wollten wir ja noch zeigen. Die Haare, die sind ja hier...das ist der Karton...der ist natürlich...den hab' ich nie mehr aufgemacht, das ist ein alter Karton...weil ich mir das nie mehr angekuckt hab'. Also '77. Und die 'spider' sind auch '77. Also, ich hab' jeden Tag immer die, eh, Haare, jeden Tag...also das sind die ganzen Ordner...ein Jahr. Ich hab' die aber nochmal gebügelt. Damit sie...weil man kann die jetzt, wenn man die 'rausnehmen würde, dann ist es hier... Also, das ist ja, weil's 'ne Krisenarbeit war. Das hab' ich nie ausgestellt.

Yes, '77. Oh, yes, the hair – we wanted to show you those. The hair, here they are – here is the box, I haven't opened it since. A very old box, haven't looked at it again... '77, and the spider, also '77. I collected the hair every day and here we have all the folders – a whole year's worth. I actually ironed them [so they wouldn't stick to the plastic sleeve]. It was crisis work, and I never exhibited it.

A.S. Und das ist ja anders. Mit den Spinnweben geht das eigentlich ganz gut zusammen, weil es ja auch ohne Mensch...weil es abgelagert [ist]. 365 Tage sind das dann – ein Jahr.

And this is different, but it goes well with the spiderwebs because they too are without the human being – it's a trace. 365 days – a whole year.

H.H. That's a lot of hair, did you have any left?

A.S. (Laughs). Yes! Weiss nicht wie's jetzt ist – oh, guck 'mal – ich hab's nie mehr gesehen – ich hab' gesehen, dass das gelb geworden – aber das ist nur der Umschlag.

Yes. No idea what it looks like now. Oh, look – I've never seen it again. It looked as if it had gone yellow, but that is only the cover.

H.H. Did you cut it?

A.S. Das sind ausgegangene oder wenigstens wenn ich sie abgeschnitten hab' ... unten hab' ich immer manchmal so'n Stück abgeschnitten. Ich hab' auch noch einen Video wo das auch nochmal...mit den abgeschnittenen [Haaren]...

They're the ones that fell out, or at least the part I cut. I frequently cut off a piece at the bottom. I've also got a video showing this again. It was censored. (This video was censored on U-tube because of Annegret's nudity.)

A.S. Also, dann hab' ich noch hier so 'ne Art – auch so ein Jahr – das Tagebuch, als die *Documenta* war; ein Projekt...dazu eingeladen...ich sollte jeden Tag ein Dokument schicken. Und da hab' ich manchmal auch die Haare...wenn ich den Kindern die Haare geschnitten hab'. [Manchmal] einen Brief, den ich bekommen hab' ...und dann, wo ich dran gearbeitet hab', oder was ich gekocht hab' hier 'mal. Immer ein persönliches meistens und ein... diese Dokumente...und die Briefmarke dann dazu...das hab' ich angepackert...Hier zum Beispiel mit den Kindern, wenn die was gesagt...die waren dann noch klein damals...Baldur...ich hab' immer den Kindern oder Baldur die Haare geschnitten. [Lots of laughter.] Also, die Haare, die sind immer irgendwie present.

Well, here is a kind of yearbook diary. Documenta was a project – they invited me. I was supposed to send them a document every day, and sometimes I included hair...when I cut the children's hair, sometimes a letter I had received...and then something I was working on, or telling what I had been cooking that day. Always something personal.... I added stamps to the documents, or something the children said...they were still small at the time, or something of Baldur's. I always cut Baldur's or the children's hair. Hair, somehow, is always present.

H.H. What was the significance of hair to you at that time? Was it purely practical?

A.S. Ja, ich wollte ja immer etwas Persönliches – und das Haar – weil es einfach ein Stück von mir selber ist, was abgeschnitten wird – oder von den Kindern. Es ist wie so'n Stempel von ei'm selbst. Wir können das Video auch noch kurz angucken – das eine – ist nur eine Passage – das dauert nicht lange – kann ich noch anstellen – das hat dann auch 'mal die Haare. Bei den Radierungen ist es ja so, also das ist ja immer mit dem Haar verbunden, deshalb hab' ich die noch rausgesucht – immer – also, das ist wirklich mit dem Haar. Es geht vom Haar aus, geht über den Körper.

Well, I always wanted to include something personal and hair is because it's a part of myself or the children, which I can cut off. It's like a stamp of myself. With the etchings it is like that, they are always connected with hair, and that is why I brought

them [hair diaries] out. It is really hair. It is always really hair. It starts with the hair and then it goes over the body.

(Looking at and sorting through many examples of A.S.'s work.)

A.S. Dann hab' ich da die Karin Struck. Die Karin Struck ist gestorben...it was for her book, and she had very long hair, und sie hat immer sehr viel Wert auf ihr Haar gelegt, und das hab' ich in den Radierungen aufgenommen. Und das war ihre Freundin – das war Frauenliebe – und sie haben ein Haar. Dann hat's hier noch 'ne Idee...Projekt...'mal gemacht. Da hab' ich also...ein Konzept für eine Galerie...da sollten wir Räume entwerfen...da hab' ich Räume entworfen: einen Schweberaum, einen Haareraum und einen Spinnenraum.

And then there's Karin Struck. Karin Struck has died. It was for her book – and she had very long hair – she always placed a lot of importance on her hair, which is something I tried to show in the etchings. And that was her friend – it was love between women – and they have one hair. Then here's another idea, a project that I did once. It was a concept for a gallery. We were supposed to design rooms: I designed a hovering room, a hair room, and a spider room.

H.H. Which year was that?

A.S. 1979.

(H.H. takes some photographs before leaving.)

H.H. Thank you very much for showing me all this.

A.S. I could show you all this for three days!

H.H. Thank you, it's been fascinating, but I mustn't take up any more of your time.

Subsequent email communication with Annegret Soltau on 7 October 2009.

This was carried out partly in English and partly in German, the latter translated by Ruth Spurgeon where necessary.

H.H. I have been wondering why you always use black rather than a coloured thread. Is there a reason for that?

A.S. I solely use black thread because it symbolizes the line, and it developed from it. Moreover, it is more precise and gives a stronger contrast. Coloured threads would get lost easier and would not be so effective.

H.H. We briefly mentioned in September 2009 the photograph on page 161 of the Kathrin Schmidt catalogue *Annegret Soltau*, (Darmstadt: Mathildenhöhe, 2006) where hair is hanging down in front of your face and you are looking up into it. Are you able to tell me what that photograph is about and if it is part of a series?

A.S. This photo of me belongs to a series which was produced in connection with the *Berührungsraum* (*Contact Area*) that I made at the same time as *Permanente Demonstration*. The room consisted of a net of threads at the ceiling on which I knotted the threads that hung into the room. The room was completely filled with these threads. The persons who wanted to watch my *Permanente Demonstration*, had to pass through this room. They were touched by the threads like by fine hair.

H.H. After you mentioned Leni Riefenstahl in the interview, I wondered what it was about her that was interesting to you. Was it her life, or the photographs she took, for example, of the Nubans where they paint their bodies?

A.S. Leni Riefenstahl for me is a controversial artist, but I guess it's cinematic skills. I mentioned her work of the photos of the Nubas in relation to my early *Fotoübernahmen* (*Self*), how the threads look like the paintings on their faces.

H.H. You also mentioned Gerhard Richter. Did you meet him during the Documenta in Kassel in 1982?

A.S. At the Documenta exhibition I saw his large archive collection of very personal photographs and documents, which impressed me personally, although I have not met him.

H.H. When Kathrin Schmidt discusses your work with spiders' webs, she uses the word 'Folie'. When translated 'Folie' seems to have many different meanings. What is its meaning in this context? Is it a specific material or is it a photographic slide (a transparency), which can be projected onto a wall or screen?

A.S. The name of the film refers to the surface of the cobweb drawings that I have used to secure them, it has no substantive significance, only technical.

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